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The Butler Detective; or, Old Grip's Grip.

BY JACKSON KNOX,—“Old Hawk.”



“I SEE THAT I CAN TRUST YOU URESERVEDLY, MR. GRIPON,” SHE MURMURED, WITH EMOTION, “AND I SHALL DO SO.”

The Butler Detective;

OR,
OLD GRIP'S GRIP.
Running Down Two French Rogues
in New York.

BY JACKSON KNOX.—“OLD HAWK.”

CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

MR. CALVIN VANDERLOOPEN, one of New York's retired merchant princes, and his nephew and heir, Mr. Waldo Dysart, a good-looking, somewhat shadily rapid young man-about-town of twenty-six or seven, were at their fashionably late breakfast in the superb Murray Hill residence of the former, pending the yet later appearance of Mrs. Athaea Vanderloopen, the merchant's attractive second wife, and Marguerite Clayton, a pretty *ingenue* of seventeen, the lady's daughter by a former marriage.

A family affair had been under discussion.

As had been too frequently the case of late, Mr. Vanderloopen, a well-preserved and handsome man, still on the right side of sixty, had been calling his nephew and heir to task over certain derelictions of duty and propriety, and the young man, after his accustomed tactics, was as careless, sulky or combative as he well dared be under the circumstances.

“You're hardly fair with me, Uncle Cal,” Waldo was saying, while lazily stirring his coffee. “Granted that there may be something in the reports of my attentions to Mlle. Aspasie Moliere Siddons, the beautiful stage-reader—”

“Humph!”

“As I was trying to say, even if I may have been a little pronounced in my attentions—”

“Gad! I should say so. Her escort, I am told, at the French Ball, where her costume, or rather lack of it, is said to have been simply outrageous even for that scandalous event! her constant cavalier-servante at this or that fashionable numskull's drawing-room, where she deigns to give, for an extortionate pecuniary consideration, what she calls her classic readings! her obedient fetch-and-carry here, there and everywhere, according to report, alike blind to your social position, your respect for me, your obligations to my step-daughter, your fiancee, and your personal interest as my conditional heir! Mark that *conditional*, if you please. Zounds, sir!” and Mr. Vanderloopen, who had worked himself up into quite a respectable fury, whacked the table-cloth with his massive silver napkin ring, and, throwing himself back in his chair, with his thumbs in the armholes of his expansive waistcoat, fairly swelled and glared at his offending nephew; “you make me ashamed of you, sir! As being my only sister's only child—as being my sole near blood relative whom I have loved, brought up and educated as if you had been my own son—I blush for you, sir!”

“Oh, blush away then, Uncle Cal, if you're that thin-skinned!” Waldo retorted. “Only you can't in justice expect me to tie myself to a school-girl's apron-strings till she attains sufficient maturity to marry me off-hand, according to contract, on her eighteenth birthday—nearly a twelvemonth hence.”

Mr. Vanderloopen was an amiable, indulgent man, in the main, whose thunder was for the most part of the touch-and-go April sort.

“Ah, you rogue!” he exclaimed, smiling; “my wife's charming child is too good for you.”

“I haven't a doubt of that, uncle.”

“Why aren't you more alive to your good fortune, then, you rascal?”

“Oh, we'll get married some day, according to orders, I suppose!”

“Of course you will, or I'll know a better reason why than Mademoiselle-Aspasie-Phryne-Cleopatra Moliere-Siddons-Garrick-Shakespeare, depend upon it! Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, give that a rest, Uncle Cal! It will be Marguerite's own fault if your wishes regarding our union are not ultimately carried out, though I don't believe she exactly looks upon me as an affianced lover just yet.”

“Gad, but she will in time, you rascal, if you only make up to her properly, instead of gadding after this foreign divinity and other *blazée* fascinators.”

“Let that pass. Not that I think you're right, though,” continued Waldo, easily. “Rita is a little beauty—in her way; there's no denying that.”

“Let me catch you denying it, young gentleman!”

“But she's so sentimental, you see, while I'm—not. At all events, my dear uncle, I've an impression that Marguerite will never, under any circumstances, exactly fancy me as a prospective husband.”

“Nonsense! yes, she will. What's the matter with you? Aren't you handsome enough—ay, and good fellow enough, too, you rogue, if I say it as shouldn't? She's got to like you and marry you, too, or I'll disinherited the hussy, as well as yourself! The idea!”

Waldo burst out laughing at the old gentle-

man's consequent confusion, for at this juncture Marguerite herself—a charmingly sweet, thoughtful-looking girl—abruptly entered, and, wholly oblivious of having been the subject of conversation, ran up affectionately to her step-father for his good-morning kiss, with a curt smile of greeting for the younger man.

“Ten o'clock, and just down to breakfast, you little minx!” exclaimed Mr. Vanderloopen, doatingly smoothing the girl's bright hair, as she perfunctorily settled into a place at his side.

“It really wasn't laziness, papa!” cried Marguerite, helping herself to the coffee and rolls, without summoning the servant. “I was out walking, and forgot the time. But, what's the difference, anyway?”

“None whatever, my pet, since our late breakfast habit is too long established to be quarreled with now, however reprehensible. Where is your mother?”

“Still in bed, like enough,” with coquettish indifference, which evoked an approving laugh from Waldo, who was the recipient of a pretty smile in return. “It was late when she returned from the Brighton Beach races, you must remember, and mamma ought to have all a sporting woman's privileges, I suppose.”

Then it was the merchant's turn to laugh, which he did quite ingenuously. Proud of his second wife, as perhaps he had never been of his first—she was still a young woman, *maugre* her daughter's embarrassing young ladyhood, and a fashionable beauty—he could readily forgive graver eccentricities than her passion for horse-racing, and even pool-betting, which she was known to indulge freely, though he had no predilection for the amusement himself.

“Let us hope, my dear,” said he, jocosely, “that your mother is clever enough to come out a winner in the main, though,” indifferently, “it's no great matter, one way or another, if she finds her diversion in the thing.”

Here Mrs. Vanderloopen herself appeared, but looking so frightened and disturbed as to cause a general alarm.

“My diamonds!” she exclaimed, sinking hysterically into the seat reserved for her at the head of the table. “Gone! Oh, Calvin! the magnificent *parure* that you gave me at our wedding, too,” and she burst into tears.

“Stolen, do you mean, my love?” faltered her husband, as soon as he could command his voice, while the others were becomingly shocked and surprised.

“I suppose so,” was the helpless reply. “They've disappeared, at all events. I thought to take a look at them just now, for the first time since my last wearing them at the Charity Ball, two weeks ago. Gone! My other and less costly jewels untouched—all but my superb diamond set! Oh, what shall I do?”

“This must be investigated at once!” exclaimed Mr. Vanderloopen, bustling energetically to his feet. “Assist me to make a search, Waldo. Marguerite, remain to comfort your poor mother. That *parure* was worth twenty thousand dollars in cold cash!”

“Twenty thousand dollars is a snug round sum,” thoughtfully observed Waldo Dysart, as he hurriedly quitted the room with his uncle.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING DIAMONDS.

AFTER the renewed and still unsuccessful search for the missing diamonds on the part of Mr. Vanderloopen and his nephew, they found Mrs. Vanderloopen awaiting their return in the morning-room, thoroughly recovered of her composure.

Indeed, she might be said to have dismissed her fears as to the lost gems in an altogether surprising manner: but then, she was a woman of unusual characteristics, some of which were as striking as her personal attractions, which were many, though no longer in their first youth.

“My heart troubled me a little at the first shock,” said she, pressing her hand to her bosom, with a smile. “But I am better now. Do not look so anxious, Calvin.” She was at times threatened with heartaffection, her sole physical ailment, and he had naturally looked concerned. “And take courage about the diamonds, too. I feel certain they will be recovered. What I want you to do is to leave the matter entirely to me.”

“Certainly, my dear Althea,” replied Mr. Vanderloopen. “But, do you agree with me that they were stolen by some one within the house, and not from without?”

“What does Waldo think?” And she turned her fine eyes curiously upon the nephew.

“I favor the outsider or burglar theory, *ma belle tante*,” replied the young man, composedly answering for himself. “However, as the theft may have been perpetrated any time during the past fortnight, according to your own showing, it is more or less like a wild-goose chase now. What theory do you incline to, my dear aunt?”

“Your uncle's,” and she fixed her eyes yet more curiously upon him. “The theft—perhaps the jewels were only surreptitiously borrowed—who knows?—was from within, not from without.”

“Good, then!” cried Waldo, seeming to mask

a certain uneasiness under a show of zeal. “Let us then cross-examine the servants without another moment's delay.”

“No, no; not unadvisedly, at least,” returned Mrs. Vanderloopen, quietly. “Calvin has said I should have my own way in this.”

“Of course you shall, my love,” interposed her husband, kissing her. “You have only to mention your will in the matter.”

“Thank you, Calvin. How good you always are! Tell me, then, what independent detective was that whose extraordinary success in a most complicated case we were discussing over the newspaper reports a few days ago?”

“Ah, I remember! Mr. Gripon, or Old Grip, as he is familiarly called—a detective of national reputation, I am told.”

The lady struck her hands together.

“That is the name!” she cried. “Send me Old Grip at once.”

“Just the thing!” exclaimed Mr. Vanderloopen, heartily. “Althea, my love, there's a world of cleverness in that pretty head of yours. Come along, Waldo. We can go down-town together, and I shall speedily hunt this detective out of his spider-den, wherever it may be, and send him up to her ladyship in short order.”

But, Waldo decided that, in view of the great value of the missing jewels, it would be better policy for him to remain around the house—perhaps with a result of picking up something of moment from a secret observation of the servants; and, notwithstanding the surprise which this determination occasioned—for the young man could not, as a general thing, quit the house too hastily for his club and other amusements—Mr. Vanderloopen ordered the carriage for himself and proceeded down-town alone.

No sooner had her husband gone, after giving her his accustomed kiss at parting, than Mrs. Vanderloopen said to Marguerite, who had remained with her:

“There is no occasion for your neglecting your music, because of this unfortunate affair, my child. Besides, I wish to speak to Mr. Dysart alone.”

She never spoke to or of her husband's heir thus formally, unless more or less out of sorts with him, and Waldo looked up as if quietly steeling himself for something possibly unpleasant, as Marguerite obediently quitted the room.

But, the lady only smiled agreeably when they were thus left alone.

“I only want to ask you a single question, step-nephew mine,” she said.

“Of course, I am entirely at your commands, my dear aunt,” easily.

“In the first place, however, you ought clearly to understand, my dear nephew, that, together with many others in our rather exclusive set, I am not blind to your attentions, of late, to this last society fad, Mlle. Aspasie Molière-Siddons” (she smiled afresh and provokingly while pronouncing the undeniably bizarre appellation) “the dramatic reader.”

Waldo bowed.

“There is nothing at all that I am ashamed of in the courtesies that I have, in common with other gentlemen, extended to the talented and beautiful lady you mention, my dear Aunt Althea,” he replied, quietly.

“Perhaps not,” a little less suavely. “But you must also know that I am aware of your guarded hint to my husband, some days ago, to the effect that this same Mademoiselle Aspasie (I wonder, by the way, if she might have christened herself?) might advantageously accord lessons in elocution and true Parisian deportment to my daughter, Marguerite!”

And there was a dangerous ring in Mrs. Vanderloopen's voice.

“You're out there!” returned Waldo, mastering a half-guilty start. “Not that I might not, truthfully and with the best of intentions for Rita's welfare, have conveyed such a hint, or even a plain proposition to that effect. Far from it. Mademoiselle Molière-Siddons is, I am convinced, a discreet and brilliant woman of the world, whose finishing instructions, as a finally molding and maturing process, any New York society lady might earnestly covet as a high boon in her daughter's interests.”

“Ah!” with an amused little laugh, which, however, had no effect upon Waldo's self-sufficient and didactic manner.

“But,” he continued, serenely, “how you managed, my dear aunt, to receive the impression that I conveyed such a hint to Uncle Calvin is beyond my comprehension. No such thing, I assure you!”

“Of course, he did not accept it as such—you may thank your stars for the good gentleman's obtuseness in that regard, my dear nephew. But, even as coming to me second-hand, I could see what you could not quite dare to say more openly, if he could not.”

Waldo bowed ironically, with his hand on his heart.

“My dear aunt, you are really to be congratulated on your prescience, or whatever you may call the gift,” he murmured, politely. “To divine another's thoughts and intentions, of which he has no consciousness himself, is truly commendable, if not positively startling, in the mind-reader.”

“Oh, we will let it pass.”

"With all my heart! You expressed a wish to propound a certain interrogatory to me?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"But you must not necessarily connect my question with my misfortune of this morning, my dear. I would prefer you to ascribe it to my womanish curiosity."

In spite of himself, Waldo began to betray uneasiness.

"As you please, my dear aunt," with a forced smile. "What is the question you would ask?"

"Merely this, my dear Waldo: Is Mademoiselle Aspasie very fond of diamonds?"

The young man sprung to his feet, the blood rushing into his face, and as suddenly departing, leaving it in a white wrath, perhaps not unmixed with consternation.

"Althea Vanderloopen, you insult me!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "It was false when you intimated that there was no covert insinuation in your question—treacherously false and brutal! If you were but a man—But enough! There has been little love lost between us thus far; there shall be still less in the future!"

And he angrily flung himself out of her presence, regardless of her astonished, or pretendedly astonished, stare, and exclamation: "Why, Waldo Dysart! what absurd suspicion are you taking to yourself?" as he was on the wing.

An hour later a down-town district-telegram from Mr. Vanderloopen announced to her that he had seen Old Grip, the detective, who would accordingly visit her early in the afternoon.

For greater privacy Mrs. Vanderloopen received her visitor when he came in her boudoir-salon—a superbly appointed room that was a perfect wonder of rich hangings, costly *objets d'art* and luxurious suggestiveness, even for an extravagant and tasteful woman's belongings; and, like the majority of those who came in confidential relations with him, she was speedily impressed by the detective's modesty, intelligence and cosmopolitanism, as evinced by his address and bearing.

Grippon had already learned from Mr. Vanderloopen the general points bearing upon the missing diamonds.

When the lady had further informed him in this regard, he said:

"I go pretty much everywhere about town, and may possibly have seen the gems since you missed them, ma'am—or rather since their felonious abstraction. Pray describe them."

CHAPTER III.

LADY AND DETECTIVE.

MRS. VANDERLOOPEN had looked at the detective in no little surprise.

"Would it be likely, sir," she asked, "that the present possessor of my diamonds would venture to wear them in public so soon after their theft?"

"Not in their entirety, unless innocent of their having been first stolen before coming into her possession—either by gift or purchase, we shall say," was Grip's response. "In any case, yes, in part. Diamonds, even when confessedly stolen, are a fascinating possession, ma'am, especially to a woman."

"You surmise at once, then, that they are more than likely in some woman's possession by this time?"

"I do."

"Strange! so do I! Like me, also, you do not think of suspecting any of our servants?"

"Not yet."

"Mr. Grippon," with her most charming smile, "it pleases me to find you such an intelligent man."

"Or to find me agreeing with you, ma'am—which? Not that it is of any consequence, or that I should not feel equally complimented, one way or the other."

"I cry *peccavi!*" admitted Mrs. Vanderloopen, laughing and blushing.

"There is really no need, ma'am. But were you not about to describe the missing jewels for my information?"

"Oh, yes; to be sure! Well, they are a complete *parure*, consisting of necklace, brooch, ear rings and tiara. My husband paid the equivalent of twenty thousand dollars for the set in Paris, and they were considered by American connoisseurs as a bargain at that. They were my wedding present from him. The diamonds composing the original set—she stole a swift glance at her hearer which was not lost upon him for just what it was worth—"though of varying sizes, were exceptionally pure and flawless. The design was novel, with a distinguishing feature identical in each separate ornament."

"That is to the point, ma'm—the distinguishing feature! What was it, if you please?"

A cross-star-and-crescent combination, almost like a monogram—and intended to represent in a mingled way the respective symbols of the Christian, Jewish and Mohammedan faiths, all of which, I believe, have been represented in my husband's remote Dutch-Spanish-Armenian ancestry. The combination was present in each separate article of the set, and, once seen, was not easily to be forgotten."

"I should say not," observed the detective,

calmly. "Madam, we have the clew. I marked the design you allude to less than a week ago!"

"You surprise me! Where?"

"At the French Masked Ball."

"Heavens! in the entire set?"

"No; only in the brooch."

"Upon whom?"

"Upon the bosom of the loveliest and boldest masker present—whose costume was so near being none at all as to cause a sensation even in such a place, where, as you may imagine, a regard for the proprieties is not altogether Puritanic."

"You seem to know everthing!"

"Not quite. I am fairly observant, however, and go about considerably."

"You recognized the woman wearing my brooch?"

"After the unmasking—yes."

"Who was it?"

"The latest society sensation, Mademoiselle Aspasie Molière Siddons."

Mrs. Vanderloopen clapped her hands together.

"My intuition was not at fault!" she murmured, half to herself. "I was sure Waldo Dysart had borrowed my missing jewels at that adventuress's instance, when I accused him of it by implication."

"Your husband's nephew and heir, I believe, ma'am?"

"Yes. You know him, too?"

"By reputation. Who does not? Besides, he was the lady's escort at the *bal masqué*."

The lady had suddenly grown very grave.

"Sir," she said, "I infer that you must have fastened upon the whereabouts of my stolen diamonds, from what my husband told you respecting their loss, even before you came to see me."

"Madam, it is true."

"You had already surmised that my husband's scapegrace of an heir was their purloiner, at this—this creature's instigation?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Grippon," very earnestly, and after a long pause, "you impress me to repose my confidence in you. May I speak to you without reserve?"

"Madam, you may. I have never betrayed an honorable confidence, and would be incapable of such a thing."

"But perhaps mine is—is not a—a strictly honorable confidence."

"Oh, yes it is—it can't be otherwise," reassuringly. "With many other fashionables of the *haut ton*, madam, for instance, is extravagantly fond of horse-racing. Fondness of this sort, especially with those who can afford to indulge it, naturally begets betting, pool-risking—we will say gambling. Gambling as naturally begets—indiscretion. Madam is human, and therefore not wholly incapable of an indiscretion. But, madam is a refined, high-minded lady, and is therefore not capable of a dishonorable intention." (She was looking at him, a bright spot on either soft cheek, with a humid brightness of the eyes, in which there was a sufficient recognition of his delicate way of putting it.) "Moreover, I read the true significance of a certain peculiar look that madam favored me with a few moments ago."

Mrs. Vanderloopen, rising, impulsively extended her hand.

"I see that I can trust you unreservedly, Mr. Grippon," she murmured, with emotion, "and I shall do so."

For reply he respectfully raised the proffered hand to his lips, and then relinquished it.

"Mr. Grippon, I thank you. Let me begin by stating a paradox, the unriddling of which, if you should prove capable of it, will be a yet more convincing test of your sagacity."

"Deign to try me, ma'am."

"My diamonds have been stolen, and they have not been stolen."

The detective pursed his brows, and regarded her intently with his piercing eyes.

"This is your paradox?"

"It is."

"The stolen gems are perhaps a paste imitation of the real gems, which have been pawned—to meet an indiscretion of the race-course."

She regarded him with a half-startled look, even while drawing a breath of unmistakable relief.

"You have divined aright—you must be something more than human, sir."

"Don't think it," returned Grippon, smiling easily. "I am pretty shrewdly logical and deductive—that is all. Pray tell me the whole story, and we shall see what is to be done. When, where and how—since you are to repose the fullest confidence in me—did you exchange the real diamonds for their imitations?"

"Three weeks ago. I had become more deeply involved than I dared to confess even to—Thank you! I shall abstain from particulars. I received five thousand dollars by the exchange, with the privilege of redeeming the gems within six months at an exorbitant interest. Every dollar went to meet my debts of honor, as they are called."

"With what diamond broker did you deal?"

"With one Laban Hertzikoff."

"Ah! the mysterious Russian-Jewish recluse of Seventh avenue."

"The same."

The detective here bounded out of his seat, and darted between the folds of a magnificent crimson-and-gold *portière*, vailing the hall-entrance door, upon which his glance had been resting.

"How you startled me!" exclaimed Mrs. Vanderloopen, on his return with a suspicion-clouded brow. "Did you suspect an eavesdropper?"

"Yes. I could have sworn I saw that curtain shake. Who have you in the house, ma'am, who might play you such a trick?"

"None that I know of—unless—Wait!" She rung for a servant, and one promptly appeared.

"Is Mr. Dysart still in the house?" she inquired.

"No, ma'am," was the reply. "The young gentleman's just gone out."

"When and how?"

"Just now, as I was coming up, ma'am. He seemed in a great hurry, too—almost out of breath, ma'am."

The servant was dismissed, after which the lady and her visitor exchanged significant looks.

CHAPTER IV.

ASPASIE.

"LET it go," observed the detective, reassuringly once more. "Even if Mr. Waldo Dysart may have surprised your secret, ma'am, he can't divulge it without criminating himself; and the real diamonds are doubtless secure enough from him in old Hertzikoff's strongbox."

Mrs. Vanderloopen tried to be at her ease again, but not very successfully at first.

"Let us see how the case now stands," continued Old Grip, genially. "Why, then, may I ask, ma'am, should you be anxious to recover the imitation gems?"

"I am so no longer—not since my first excitement over discovering their loss this morning. I will explain. It was not that I had grown used to the substitution, or come to think of them as the real diamonds. Oh, no! But I at once intuitively suspected the cause of their disappearance, and was willing enough to disgrace Waldo hopelessly in my husband's esteem."

"He is to marry my daughter, Mr. Grippon, as a condition to his remaining sole heir-apparent to my husband's princely wealth, and I hate and despise him. He is weak, profligate, dishonorable—in every respect unworthy of my daughter. I would, if possible, have ruined his prospects, without injuring hers—in pure self-defense."

"I understand; and now this is out of the question."

"Exactly—for the present, at least. Besides, while Mr. Vanderloopen and Waldo were searching for the missing jewels this morning I unexpectedly received a letter."

"Ah!"

"It was from a legal firm in a distant city, inclosing me a check representing a bequest from a relative recently deceased. I hadn't even heard of her illness—a great-aunt of mine, on my mother's side—had of late years almost forgotten the poor old dear's existence, I am afraid. The check was for precisely five thousand dollars. My husband need never know of its reception by me. I hate to deceive him, but dread still more to expose the extent of my ruinous speculations in those racing pools. It is the exact sum for which my real diamonds are in pawn with the Russian Jew. I have more than enough pin-money left to cover whatever usury may be his due."

"Ah! And you would redeem them out of his clutches without delay, after which—well, they would not have been stolen at all, but only misplaced, or dropped behind your dressing-case, where you could accidentally come across them, to the restored serenity of Mr. Vanderloopen, and, let us say, to the possibly consequent despair of Mademoiselle Aspasie Molière-Siddons, in any event?"

"My intention to the letter, Mr. Grippon, and you must help me to carry it out. This is my real object for requesting this interview."

"But why should you require any assistance? Wait; let me see. This old Hertzikoff is an odd genius, of unusual business methods."

"That is just it. He seems to live all alone with a queer little old woman, as repulsive as himself, in an isolated den of a cottage in upper Seventh avenue, and his business methods are, indeed, unusual. He will not transact business at all, save at night, between the hours of nine and twelve. I have driven there once alone, but was nervous and frightened, and dread to do so again."

The detective arose.

"I shall cheerfully accompany you this evening, ma'am, if such is your wish," he said.

"It is my wish, sir," replied the lady. "I am glad to have made your acquaintance, Mr. Grippon—you are so different from what I have conceived of detectives as a class. I feel that you are already a friend."

She cordially extended her hand at parting.

and the exchange of a few words as to details completed the arrangement.

Waldo Dysart, on his part, however, had, as may have been surmised, directly upon escaping from his eavesdropping concealment behind the crimson-and-gold portière in Mrs. Vanderloopen's boudoir-salon, hurried away to bear the secret intelligence he had surprised to Mlle. Aspasie, the enslaver of his heart and imagination.

He was in rather high glee, too, over what he had discovered, was this precious young sprig of fine clothes, frivolity and few principles.

His uncle's fashionable wife had not erred in her estimate of Waldo's character. He was rather weak than vicious, more fool than knave. Mrs. Vanderloopen's wedding parure of diamonds were socially famous. Aspasie had admired them on their owner's person from a respectful distance at the Charity Ball. As a natural consequence, Waldo had been, after sundry feeble protests, no sooner advanced than commanded or wheedled out of sight, easily persuaded to surreptitiously borrow the sparklers that Aspasie might have the satisfaction of a nearer and more unrestrained visual feast upon their beauty. As paste imitations, they were a success, and Aspasie was an expert, though covetous as a miser and greedy as a shark. She had accordingly coolly refused to return the trinkets, and even dared to wear the brooch of the set at the *Bal Masque de la Cercle de l'Harmonie*, as we have seen.

As a consequence, the young fellow had been more or less on the tenter-hooks of mortification, terror and despair ever since. Over and above everything, was he a lazy sybarite, a sensuous do-nothing in love with his employment. There was one specter even more terrifying to him than Aspasie's displeasure—the specter of his uncle's permanent disfavor, with the social and pecuniary elimination that it would signify; and, once discovered, he knew that the abstraction of the jewels would be an unforgivable crime even in the indulgent old gentleman's eyes.

"But now, Hallelujah! Only a bogus theft had been committed, after all! The surreptitious gleamers were but paste. All he would have to do was to declare the fact to the adventuress, to have them contemptuously resigned to him; and, moreover, wouldn't he have his detested step-aunt thenceforth more or less at his mercy, in possession of her secretas to the deception she had practiced on her husband, after he should have caused the counterfeits, by their surreptitious restoration, to reappear among her treasures as mysteriously as they had vanished?

So he thought, and was in high feather in consequence.

But he did not yet know Aspasie.

She was found at her lodgings, under the finishing ministrations of her hair-dresser—a sinister-visaged itinerant coiffeur, much in vogue of late with New York fine ladies of dashing tendencies, calling himself Fraggaponi, and something of a privileged character in his way.

Waldo scowled, for he cordially detested the fellow, who now looked up with a sort of grimace, that might mean almost anything, from as superb a capillary edifice—blue-black, wavy, abundant, lustrous as the raven's wing—as ever crowned a brunette beauty so perfect in its tropical characteristics and so ravishing in its blending of Gallic chic, Oriental languor and Amazonian stateliness, as fairly to take away the breath.

"Just in time, mon cher!" cried Aspasie, peering up naively at the intruder from under a finishing touch with the curling-tongs. "I'm due for a reading at Mrs. Altamont Dashaway's kettle-drum inside of an hour, and it's lucky you are here to escort me, seeing that no end of love-lorn young gentlemen, as well gilded as you, would have been but too delighted to take your place. There are the cards of a dozen of them left within the past hour. That will do, Fragggy! Get out! When I want you again, you shall know."

And, springing up with sprightly energy, she fairly drove the hair-dresser out of the room, scarcely giving him time to snatch up his professional belongings, after which she engulfed her slender blonde admirer in an embrace, topping it off with a merry flesh-and-blood kiss that would have put life and pulse into a stone image.

A magnificently statuesque yet indolently flexible figure, with neck and arms suggesting the purest of classic sculpture, save that the latter were covered to the elbow with black silk mitts, which also covered the plump, shapely hands down to the first knuckles; a complexion perfect in color and texture as an illuminated peach, though of olive depth, purity and tone; eyes like stars, black, brilliant, changeable; features Parisian in their vivacity, Circassian in their regularity, with lips of coral, whose kiss of true-love might constitute an empire's ransom, but whose bite behind them might be as the tiger's crunch, or the envenomed serpent's sting; a voice vibrant in its compass, melodious in its exquisite modulations, which was rather en-

hanced by a slightly foreign accent; and say an age anywhere from twenty-eight to thirty-six, with the former more likely as a first impression.

Such, physically, at least, was Mlle. Aspasie Molière-Siddons *en negligée*.

"Ahal! what is the matter?" She was now holding her admirer at arm's length, inspecting him narrowly, suspiciously. "Distrait, eh? Why did I not remark it before? Explain at once, my dear, or do you know what will happen to you? I shall throw you out of the window!"

CHAPTER V.

THE RUSSIAN JEW.

WALDO laughed, and, sitting down, he drew the eccentric beauty to his side.

Then he told her what he had learned.

"So now, my adorable girl!" he observed, in conclusion; "it will cost you no further pang to return me the trinkets, since they are worthless, and I shall, after secretly restoring them to my aunt's dressing-case, be well out of a predicament that was beginning to make me nervous, I must confess. Where are they?"

But she had been drawing slowly away from him during his recital, and was now regarding him with a peculiar look that somehow made him uneasy.

"This pretty aunt of yours is no knave's fool, my dear?" she irrelevantly observed.

"Who said she was, my dear Aspasie? And, what has that got to do with it?"

"So the real *parure* is now in the possession of old Laban Hertzikoff, the Russian Jew, *mon cher*?"

"Yes, yes," impatiently; "and likely to remain there, I should say," for Waldo's eavesdropping had been interrupted prior to Mrs. Vanderloopen's mention of the timely bequest, and its prospective bearing upon the pledged jewels.

"This *viillard Russe eccentric*," continued the adventuress thoughtfully, "is not unknown to me. He once vegetated in the Montmartre, or I am mistaken."

"What possesses you, Aspasie?"

"And a detective with your *chere tante*, too, you say? I don't like detectives. What is this one like?"

"How should I know or care?" a little savagely. "An unassuming, gentlemanly fellow, with eyes like center bits, as near as I could judge. They call him Old Grip, I believe, though there's nothing in his appearance to suggest the name."

She had involuntarily started at the mention of the name.

"Old Grip!—that would be *L'Ancienne Prise Griffée* in French," she murmured, paling slightly. "Strange! There was a *Prise Griffée* in Paris—a veritable griffin's clutch—a terrible man!"

"What are you talking about?" exclaimed Waldo, thoroughly exasperated. "Are you beside yourself, Aspasie?"

"Perhaps—who knows?" She sprung up impulsively, with a short laugh. "Wait till I dress for that kettle-drum. Ten minutes—five!"

"But hold on, Aspasie!" and he followed her to the door of the adjoining bed-chamber, into which she had started. "Those paste diamonds, you know?"

"Back, impudent!" motioning him back with mock horror. "I am a vestal into whose bed-chamber even the most impious do not peep—not even you, *cher amant*!"

"But the sham diamonds—when shall you give them to me?"

"Not now, at all events. Yet stay; when you get for me the *real ones* in their place—not a day, not an hour before!"

"Woman, are you mad? They are in Hertzikoff's safe-keeping!"

"Man, are you an idiot? or is the Russian Jew an ogre, whose guardianship is invulnerable?" And, with a laugh, she shut the door in his face.

"Of course, she is only chaffing me," he thought. "She will tire of the caprice presently, and give me back the stones."

But she did nothing of the sort.

Even after their return from the Altamont-Dashaway kettle-drum—where it is needless to say that Mlle. Aspasie Molière-Siddons had contributed her specialty to the entertainment with *éclat* to her reputation and profit to her pocket-book—when Waldo grew even angrily urgent for the return of the imitation jewels, she suddenly confronted him with a sternness that was altogether new to him, and no less embarrassing than novel.

"*Cher ami*, this is getting to be a bore," she said, coldly.

"But what the dence shall I do?" cried the young man, desperately.

She held the door open suggestively, and turned to him with her inexplicable smile.

"One of two things, my dear," she replied. "Kiss me—and forget; or take your *congé*, and return no more."

He went away desperate, angry with himself, but with the passionate aroma of her kiss like a flower of fire upon his lips.

It was now late in the evening, they having

supped at a fashionable restaurant on their way home from the kettle-drum.

Left alone in her apartments, Aspasie stepped to the wall, and touched an electric-bell which communicated with Monsieur Fraggaponi's floor of the lodging-house.

The coiffeur made his appearance with surprising promptness.

Aspasie changed her dress, and was once more *en negligée*, but with a set look of alertness and energy as if on the threshold of some daring adventure.

"The time, *mon brave*?"

"Hard on to nine, *belle petite*."

"And it rains?"

"Like fury, *petite*!"

"Good! My rough masculine suit, and then the coach. You shall accompany me."

"In a moment, little sister Rose!" And the sinister-visaged hair-dresser, or whatever else he might be, disappeared.

He quickly returned, dressed as if for roughing it and muffled to the eyes, in one hand a serviceable valise, in the other a bundle.

Taking the latter from him, Aspasie, in whose peerless eyes a bold, venturesome glitter had gradually kindled, disappeared into the sleeping-room, from which she presently emerged transformed.

In rough masculine costume, and with her face all but muffled out of sight, she presented almost as forbidding an appearance as her companion, save that nothing could wholly disguise a suggestion of grace and exquisite proportion in her every attitude and movement.

She glanced inquiringly at the valise in the man's hand.

"Everything—lantern and all—nothing forgotten?" she queried.

"Yes! yes!" with an impatient nod.

"Come!"

They guardedly quitted the rooms, and a neighboring church-clock was striking nine when, having silently stepped into a close carriage in waiting, they were whirled away in the darkness and the rain.

It was two hours later when, the later hour having been selected by Mrs. Vanderloopen as promising greater secrecy, another coach, containing that lady and her detective companion, drove up to the miserable, but strongly secured, little old house known among certain fashionables and others as the office-residence of Laban Hertzikoff, the mysterious Russian-Jew diamond broker.

Surrounding the entrance, in the sloop and darkness, partly relieved by a neighboring street-lamp, was a crowd of curious persons, with here and there the glitter of a patrolman's gilt buttons.

"Something unusual, this," commented Old Grip to his companion, after a glance without.

"Better let me investigate first."

He slipped out of the coach, and disappeared in the crowd.

"You must not go in—it is not fit!" he hurriedly said, upon his return. "We are perchance forestalled."

And he whispered something in the lady's ear that caused her to start and blanch.

She persisted in getting out, however, after carefully veiling her face, and the detective, finding further remonstrance useless, escorted her into the house, while making a significant sign in passing which was understood and respected by the policeman on guard.

Laban Hertzikoff, the Russian Jew, had been foully murdered!

His body lay where it had been found, before the door of his little iron safe, which bore evidences of having been feloniously rifled, in whole or in part; two policemen on guard over it, while at the head sat a shriveled, yellowed little old woman, the picture of silent resignation and despair.

She, however, turned a curious look upon the detective's horrified and veiled companion.

"If there are gems, madam, that you were intending to redeem," she said, calmly, and with a guttural foreign accent, "you must come some other time. You see," with ghastly sarcasm, "how it is with him now."

And then she broke into a desolate little wail.

CHAPTER VI.

A SECOND MYSTERY.

THREE days later there was a gathering of such clients of the murdered Hertzikoff as were desirous of redeeming pledges which had been placed in his hands for moneys loaned.

The first blast of the public sensation had blown over; the strange old money-lender was in his grave, the mystery of his murder being still unsolved; and his widow, Nadka Hertzikoff (the shriveled and yellowed little old woman to whom we have been briefly introduced), having met the necessary legal requirements and qualifications, was in readiness, per advertisement, to take up the business threads of affairs, as fallen from her husband's dead hands, and continue or knot them short in the interest of his estate, of which she was the sole and undisputed representative.

It was not long in being generally agreed that the murdered usurer's affairs could not have well descended into more keenly intelligent and

more worthily rapacious hands than those of Nadka. From having been her husband's life-long and confidential companion-shark in the deep waters of extortionate acquisition, she seemed perfectly adequate to steer her way alone.

Hertzikoff had loaned money solely upon precious stones, and the majority of his customers had been ladies. There was something of the lottery element in the present gathering. The money-lender's strong-box, in which he had kept the valuables pledged to him, and in whose defense he had given up his life, had been only partly rifled of its contents, the number and nature of the abstractions being only determinable, so far as the pledgers were concerned, as the presentation of the various certificates should be made. You could redeem your pledge or prove its safe-keeping, provided it had not disappeared with the murderer, otherwise the estate, as represented by the capable Nadka, was responsible for its full value, such as might thereafter be proved.

Among those early on hand at this interesting gathering was, as might be expected, Mrs. Althea Vanderloopen. Still *incognita*, and with her faithful detective at her side, she was in a painful state of suspense as to whether she would be able to redeem her costly *parure* out of the Hertzikoffian clutch, or it should prove among the missing valuables.

The detective had his own private conjecture on this point, but being a very considerate man, was careful to keep it to himself.

The anxious applicants gathered together in a dingy front room of the Hertzikoff cottage, were being admitted severally into a yet dingier office or consultation-room adjoining, where the broker had been found murdered, and in which the widow, assisted by a foreign-looking clerk of greasy aspect—a limb of the law being also in attendance—was dispatching the business now in hand.

"Fortunate woman!" whisperingly commented Mrs. Vanderloopen to her escort, as a lady smilingly issued from the inner room, to give place to a fresh applicant of noticeably anxious mien. "Oh, if I shall only come out of that terrible room as light of heart as she appears to be!"

"Patience, ma'am, and, above all, don't be over-sanguine," calmly counseled her companion. "At all events, you can avoid publicity, if you are still intent upon doing so."

"Of course, I am—that in any event, Mr. Gripon! But my superb diamonds! should they prove missing, thus necessitating a humiliating confession to my husband, or continued mystery and deceit, I"—she drew her veil closer, pressing her hand to her heart—"well, I suppose I shall bear it as best I may, that is all."

Here the door again opened, to give egress to the last applicant—a middle-aged, fashionable-looking woman, whose facial anxiety had apparently been only deepened by her experience within—and the lawyer in attendance, who was also acting as a sort of master of ceremonies, peered out inquisitively, with a card between his fingers which the detective recognized as Mrs. Vanderloopen's which he had handed in on their first arrival.

"Our turn!" he whispered to his companion. "Courage!"

The next moment they were before the diamond-broker's window, who sat behind a low counter, piled high with packages of various sizes and shapes, the open iron safe at her side still bearing evidences of the semi-rifling to which it had been subjected.

Nadka was looking more shriveled and yellowed than ever, but her sense of bereavement, if it had any existence at all, was a thing of the past, and she was alive with business instinct to her skinny fingers' ends.

She glanced at the lady's card, then at the pawn-certificate, which Old Grip had presented in his companion's behalf.

"1231!" she called off from the ticket.

The greasy clerk, seated at a greasy desk near her elbow, deftly searched a dog-eared and yet greasier ledger that was open before him, repeated the number, made a scratch or two with his pen, and then made an investigating dive into the interior of the safe.

"Madam is fortunate," said the old woman, turning a pair of glittering little greenish eyes upon her veiled visitor. "The package containing madam's jewel-case had evidently been tampered with by the robber assassin, and then forgotten to be included in his hastily-selected plunder."

Mrs. Vanderloopen drew a long breath of intense relief.

"I can participate in madam's thankfulness," continued Nadka, while the search in the safe proceeded. "The loan advanced—five thousand dollars—was unusually large, and the estate could have ill-afforded to sacrifice the amount, through the loss of the jewels pledged."

"The estate would have sacrificed more than that, computing the difference between the amount loaned and the cost value of the pledge, in such an event," bluntly interposed the detective. "The diamonds are well worth

twenty thousand dollars, as could have been readily proved."

Nadka shrugged what time had left of her skinny shoulders, as much as to say, "Well, your proofs would have had to be mighty solid, to get anything extra out of this special estate, my good man," and here the greasy clerk reappeared from his rummaging search in the safe, and the desired package was laid before her.

It bore evidences of having been broken open and then carefully done up again.

Nadka undid the wrappings, and the familiar red Russian-leather jewel-case greeted Mrs. Vanderloopen's eyes, which sparkled accordingly through her veil.

"You wish to redeem these jewels now, madam?" queried Nadka, at the same time reading the amount loaned, together with the interest—a sufficiently extortionate figure—from a slip of paper the clerk had previously placed before her.

The lady had of course come prepared with the requisite cash.

"Certainly—at once!" she eagerly replied; and had already produced her pocket-book when the detective, as if suddenly suspicious, interposed his hand.

"Not yet—wait!" he said, with respectful firmness. "Let me counsel you, ma'am, to be first sure of the jewels you pledged being still intact."

Mrs. Vanderloopen accordingly hesitated, while both the old woman and the clerk looked up in unaffected surprise.

"Why, of course they are here!" exclaimed Nadka. "Who could have disturbed them? See!"

She touched a spring by which the lid of the case flew open, exposing what appeared at first glance to be the full set of diamonds intact and in all their magnificence.

But Mrs. Vanderloopen, who, together with her companion, had eagerly bent over them, after the first critical inspection started back with an exclamation of dismay

"These are not my real diamonds!" she faintly murmured. "They are the paste-imitation ones that were stolen from my dressing-case!"

"What is this you say?" cried Nadka, in honest amazement and alarm, while the clerk and lawyer came crowding forward. "Imitations?"

"Yes," the detective responded for his companion, he, being something of an expert, having detected the counterfeits at their initial flash. "A substitution has been effected. These are not the pure and costly jewels that this lady placed in pawn, but the worthless paste-imitations of them, which she received in temporary exchange from your husband, together with the loan advanced."

Nadka had turned as white as the natural hue of her time-yellowed skin would permit.

"God of Jacob!" she exclaimed, in terror and despair, "then the substitution was made by the same hand that stabbed my Laban to death!"

"The lady, sir!" cried the clerk, touching the detective's arm, "she is ill!"

Old Grip caught Mrs. Vanderloopen in his arms just as she was sinking to the floor, her hand pressed convulsively to her bosom.

"The heart-trouble! and I doubt if I get over this attack," she whispered to him, striving bravely to bear up. "Enjoin them to secrecy, at any cost—my husband must not know of this wretched complication—then see me to my house as secretly as possible. Mr. Gripon, I trust in you as a friend."

"That you are safe in doing," he replied, reassuringly.

Then, having taken the necessary measures according to her wish, he succeeded in returning her to her residence somewhat restored.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVE'S COMPACT.

"I SAY, Gripon!" cried Mr. Vanderloopen, half-tauntingly; "what new excitement could you have been leading my wife into yesterday, apropos of the secret quest of those accursed diamonds which she persuaded me at the outset to leave, unquestioned, in the hands of the pair of you?"

It was the morning following the startling discovery at the Hertzikoff house, and the detective had just called to inquire as to any fresh commands from the lady, the old merchant himself, innocent man, not having as yet the remotest suspicion of the complicated and tragic affair into which the case had developed.

"Why, we are still hoping for progress in tracing the diamonds, sir," replied Gripon, guardedly. "True, Mrs. Vanderloopen had something of a seizure when we were following up a certain clew yesterday, but she requested me to say nothing of it, and was looking greatly restored before we returned. Not another attack, I sincerely hope, sir?" anxiously.

Mr. Vanderloopen had been on the point of going down-town, to attend a directors' meeting of a wealthy corporation of which he was a member, and still retained his hat in his hand.

"Perhaps not, but she is looking no better than a ghost—I know that much!" he observed,

irritably. "Moreover, I have reason to fear that her physician is more alarmed about her than he will confess. But the deuce, man! if one's wife—a woman of fashion and wealth—persists in playing the part of a petticoated Vidocq, with you to assist her—and handicapped with a constitutional heart-weakness into the bargain—what the dickens is a man to do?"

The detective could not help smiling at Mr. Vanderloopen's simplicity.

"I hope, sir, you do not imagine that Mrs. Vanderloopen's indulgence of her caprice in this matter is of any special consequence to me, one way or another, or that I would presume to encourage her in a way opposed to your wishes. If you do, you are vastly mistaken, and I shall at once sever all connection with the case, notwithstanding the offense that I am sure it would cause the lady," and the detective's face betrayed his decision.

Gripon's past reputation in his profession, national in its character, was a sufficient support for the self-respecting independence of his words. It was not the first time that his straightforward manliness of speech and manner had pleased the merchant, and he was pleased now.

"Pshaw! don't think it," and Mr. Vanderloopen good-humoredly extended his hand, which was cordially grasped. "Let the little woman have her swing at the detective game, and welcome, if it only amuses her, and her health is not to suffer. By the way, she is doubtless waiting to confer with you now, and I suppose," laughing, "it will be nothing short of a 'Venice Preserved' conspiracy mystery between you before she tires of the sport. Only," with a half-jocose return of his irritability, "I do wish those plaguey diamonds had been in the bottom of the sea, or the coffers of the Shah of Persia, before I gave a young fortune for them, three years ago!"

And with that he took himself off, like the unsuspecting and kind-hearted gentleman that he was.

Mrs. Althea Vanderloopen was waiting to receive the detective in her boudoir-salon and in a charming morning toilette, whose robe de chambre of delicate blue satin prettily harmonized with her blonde comeliness and contrasted the rich crimson upholstering of the luxurious fauteuil in which she half reclined.

Gripon's observant eye quickly detected the pitiable haggardness, however, in spite of the rouge, which she had not spared, and her labored sprightliness of manner.

He had no sooner seated himself than she surprised him by hurrying seriously into the subject that was upon her mind with unexpected abruptness.

"Mr. Gripon, little more time is to be lost, for I am practically a dying woman," she began, energetically. "Don't interrupt me, for I know precisely the significance of my words, and I want you to enter into a compact with me before it is too late.

"Listen: A sort of revelation has come to me during a sleepless night, and there is something of prescience in what I am about to tell you.

"That woman—that adventuress, Waldo's enslaver—who we are morally sure instigated him to steal for her my fictitious diamonds, under the impression, of course, that they were the genuine jewels, is in some way at the bottom, if not the actual perpetrator, of the Russian Jew's assassination, by which the false gems were substituted for the real ones—now presumably in her possession.

"I see by your face, my friend, that the same suspicion has occurred to you. Answer me briefly if I am right, or not."

"You are."

"Ah! and you perhaps wonder at my inexperience having proved equally penetrative? But you need not. It has all come in a mysteriously revelatory way, as I have said—perhaps the strange interior species of clear-seeing, or clairvoyance, that is known to come to certain sensitive mortals as a forerunner of their dissolution—perhaps even as a psychological consequence of that solemn transitional approach. Who knows, or ever can know?"

"However, I am satisfied of what I assert. I am, moreover, satisfied that that baleful woman—whether intentionally, or as the unconscious instrument of Fate—is destined to be the death of me, and that terrible consequences to my young daughter's prospects must ensue, through the same malign instrumentality, unless provided against.

"Her indirect stab of yesterday shattered me dreadfully. The next blow will kill, and it is coming somehow—coming soon. I feel and know it. Marguerite went out driving with Waldo Dysart, at his urgent and unusually tender request, an hour ago. Since her departure, I have been filled with forebodings of I know not what.

"Gripon, my friend, this is the compact that I would have you enter into with me, a dying woman. My daughter! Engage yourself to keep secret watch and guard over her when I am gone. Take this!" she drew a package from her bosom and placed it in the detective's hands. "Should you require to justify your

right of guardianship to either my husband or Marguerite herself, or to both, there is that within this package which will satisfy them of your authorization from me.

"Sir, will you undertake this obligation that I demand of you? In addition to my blessing upon your head, I solemnly engage for you generous pecuniary reward, recognition and gratitude, on the part of my husband, in the end. Speak!"

She paused breathlessly, her sweet eyes fixed pleadingly, imploringly, upon his face.

"I accept the obligation," slowly replied the detective, with his accustomed decisiveness. "It is a compact between us, ma'am—but solely on a certain understanding that you must come to with me."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST BLOW—A COUP DE GRACE.

"I ACCEPT the condition beforehand!" exclaimed the lady, eagerly. "My friend, what is it that you would have me understand?"

"Two things. First, that I am a newly-married man, and to a beautiful, all but perfect woman, who engages every personal instinct and devotion of my life."

Mrs. Vanderloopen smiled.

"As if all the world," she said, "had not heard of your Showman Detective adventures, and with your romantic marriage to the beautiful Luella Shoresby! But why would you have me informed as to this, my friend?"

Grippon hesitated.

"To relieve your mind of a possible doubt of my ultimate disinterestedness," he replied, after a pause.

"I do not exactly understand."

He cast down his eyes, a flush coming into his bronzed cheeks.

"Your daughter is a very beautiful and charming young girl—growing more so every day. Some men in assuming the guardianship over her that you request of me—nay, doubtless the majority of men, whose hearts were not already given to another, as is mine—might—might be in danger of forgetting the trust reposed in them in—in a warmer and less disinterested feeling."

For the first time she understood the simple nobleness of the suggestion.

She held out her hand to him impulsively.

"Sir," she exclaimed, with emotion, "now I know how thoroughly I can trust you—how perfectly placed is the confidence that I would repose in you! Such an anxiety as you intimate had not occurred to me in connection with you, though it might naturally enough have been prompted with regard to another. I thank God, sir," the tears were in her eyes, "for the privilege of having made your acquaintance—of having earned your splendid friendship!"

With a deprecating shrug of his massive shoulders the detective, as once before, raised the proffered hand to his lips with old-school respectfulness and gallantry.

And during the brief silence that ensued both felt that their bond of honorable friendship had an additional strengthening and interior significance, not to be dissolved by circumstance or time.

"There was something else, I believe?" Mrs. Vanderloopen queried, at last.

"One other condition—yes."

"Which is?"

"That I am to use my own discretion in the future—if left alone with this affair, as you suggest—as to acquainting your husband with the entire facts in this tragic complication averted by your lost diamonds."

A pained look flitted over the lady's face. Had she hoped to keep her husband ignorant of her not unpardonable duplicity even to the end? At all events, she presently smiled again—a resigned little smile though it was.

"So be it!" she sighed, adding half to herself: "What matter, after all, if he should think somewhat contemptuously of me after I am no more?"

The detective caught at the words.

"Impossible—it could not be!" he interposed, gravely. "You morbidly overrate the importance of your indiscretion. Your memory should not suffer an iota—I would see to that—so would his sense of justice."

"Thank you!" she made a dismissive gesture. "Now as to our compact?"

"It is made!"

They clasped hands, and the obligation was ratified.

Then Grippon looked up with a beamingly cheery face.

"But now for a brighter view of everything!" he cried. "You are not going to die, my friend; away with these dismal forebodings, the black offspring of an overwrought nerve or brain! You are still to direct and coöperate with me, your detective cavalier, as heretofore."

The lady smiled, but shook her head, for his hopefulness, which she knew to be more or less the assumption of his generosity, could not communicate itself to her.

"At least in my forebodings I am not morbid, my friend," she replied, in a fateful tone.

"The blow dealt me out of the invisible yesterday shattered me to the core. The next one, which is surely preparing, must as surely kill."

"But this seems to me little short of preposterous!" persisted the detective, earnestly.

"Even assuming that your shock of yesterday was delivered through the fate-directed instrumentality of this adventuress—even in itself as far-fetched an assumption as can reasonably be conceived—she must be unconscious of your susceptibility to such shocks. You can be scarcely more than entirely unknown to her."

"How can I be sure of that? Waldo is doubtless her slave; she must have seen me wearing those fatal diamonds for her cupidity to have prompted their theft; and, moreover, he, too, detests me, as the possible destroyer of his heirship in my husband's princely estate."

"I don't quite follow you."

Mrs. Vanderloopen blushed.

"Should I live," she murmured, "and my husband should prove not always childless—"

"I beg your pardon for my obtuseness!"

But still he shook his head incredulously.

"My friend, I know what I feel, and I feel that these forebodings of mine are prophetic in their nature. Even after I am dead, that terrible woman will, in some way, work misery for the loved ones surviving me in this house, unless counteracted by your compact of today."

"But how?"

"Who can say? Waldo has already—before the diamonds disappeared, however—vaguely hinted that she might advantageously visit my daughter as an instructress. Once installed in the bosom of this household, what might ensue? They tell me she is incredibly beautiful and fascinating. Mr. Vanderloopen, for all his easy-going disposition and uxorious fondness for me, is still a man of powerful passions. As between him, with his assured wealth and well-preserved age, and his washed-out blonde of a nephew, of commonplace profligacies and shuttlecock nature, would such an adventuress pause long in her selection? And need I say more? Heavens! to think of my unhappy Marguerite in such a terrible complication!"

"I do understand you, ma'am. But, bless me! this is borrowing trouble with a vengeance. I can call it nothing else."

She laid her hand upon his arm.

"My friend, you do not wholly think so. No; you started involuntarily when I hinted the possibility of her having already conceived the idea of introducing herself here. A new anxiety now seizes me. Tell me: can you be aware of her antecedents?"

"Perhaps more than she imagines," after a troubled pause. "I had thought it advisable to keep this to myself—at least for a while."

"Where and when did you know of her before?"

"In Paris, years ago."

"Who and what was she then?"

"Rose Meurtrante, alias Purplette des Gants—Purplette of the Gloved Hands. By the way, she still retains that mystery, I perceive, whatever it may be."

"What mystery?"

"The mystery of her long mitts from elbows to knuckles. She was never without them of old."

"What was she then?"

"A terrible creature of terrible family-connections, yet lovely as the hour of a sultan's hasheesh dream. You have perhaps heard of Emile Zola's *Nana*?"

"Yes."

"It is said to have been modeled from this woman's extraction, character and early career."

"My God! to think of such a creature barely conceiving the idea of introducing herself—But no more at present! There is Marguerite's voice on the stair."

Radiant with her healthful youth and beauty, the young girl burst joyously into the room.

"Oh, mamma! such a delightful morning!" she cried, and she ran into the proudly-extended maternal arms, after a happy nod for the detective, who had already won upon her liking and confidence. "The doctor is just come, but I would not let him come up till I had seen and told you."

"My darling!" and the mother fondly held her at arm's-length while gazing doatingly into the sweet flushed face. "And where did Waldo take you driving to?"

"Oh, almost everywhere through the Park, and finally to visit a friend of his!" Marguerite clasped her hands. "Oh, mamma! such a beautiful, such a fascinating lady! I am in love with her already!"

"A lady?" Mrs. Vanderloopen had started to her feet, with an ashen face, her eyes blazing with alarm. "A lady friend of Waldo's?"

"Yes; but oh dear! what have I done—what ails you, mamma?"

"No matter; the name—the lady's name?"

The detective interposed a warning exclamation, but it was unheeded or misunderstood.

"She was the beautiful dramatic reader we have heard about," was the girl's bewildered response. "Mademoiselle Aspasie Molière Siddons."

The unhappy mother fell back in the *fauteuil*, clutching at her heart.

"I knew it—the last blow—it has come!" she wailed, her head dropping forward on her breast.

At the same instant the physician entered the room, and, with the detective, sprung to her side, while Marguerite, amazed and terrified, burst into helpless sobs.

"Let Mr. Vanderloopen be summoned instantly!" said the physician, a few minutes later, when the fainting lady had been carried to bed by her hastily-summoned servants. "It is as I feared—some fresh emotional excitement has done sad work here. There is serious danger."

It was more than serious; it was mortal.

Althea Vanderloopen had not remonstrated in vain, and the insidious fate-winged shaft had reached her life's fountain-seat.

She did not once regain consciousness, and when the agonized husband reached home, an hour later, she was dead.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DETECTIVE'S QUANDARY.

EDWARD GRIPPON sat at his desk, in his aerial down-town office-den, an open letter before him, his brow knitted with troubled thought.

He felt himself in a perplexing quandary, which was something unusual in his experience.

After an uneventful fortnight following upon Mrs. Vanderloopen's death, he had just received secret information of a certain contemplated activity on the part of Aspasie toward securing a permanent foothold in the rich widow's home, thus putting his covenanted guardianship over the orphaned Marguerite to the initial test; and yet here before him was a freshly received letter from the far Southwest, with regard to an old and newly-opened detective case, urgently demanding his undelayed presence in a remote locality.

But the astute detective was never long in cutting the Gordian knot of whatever difficulty presented itself in the exercise of his profession, and cross-purposes, however unexpected, never interfered more than momentarily with his plans.

"Cheese-it!"

The familiar attendant sprite of the close-fitting mouse-colored habit was on hand from the dusky inner office as soon as his name was uttered, solemn and alert as ever.

"Yes, sir!"

"You know the residence of Mademoiselle Aspasie Moliere-Siddons, the recent popular society dramatic reader?"

"Like a book, sir."

"Find out what you can of her movements since yesterday morning. On your way up, see if Mrs. Grippon can call down here and confer with me without delay. I shall expect your report inside of three hours."

The boy obediently vanished.

Half an hour later the detective's lovely wife—they had been two years married, but she was no less radiant and fascinating than when, as Luella Shoresby, she had first captivated his dauntless heart—made her smiling appearance.

They were no less partners in business, so far as reciprocal confidence was concerned, than partners in the conjugal relation.

"Well," said Luella, after the perplexity had been explained to her, "as a matter of course, you obey the Texas demand, and at the same time look after the little Marguerite."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Why, of course!—The vulture is in the dove's nest already—or preparing for her rapacious swoop, which is much the same thing! In any event, your covenant with the poor dead mother is not to be neglected at this first critical pinch. While your Texas engagement—though it is somewhat perplexing that it should come up so inopportune—must also be met."

"Exactly. What an astonishing head for business is that pretty one of yours, my better half!"

"Glad you think so!" complacently. "It made money at the circus and menagerie business once, at all events."

"Granted. But will you kindly enlighten me, my love, as to how I can go to San Antonio and at the same time look after the welfare of Miss Marguerite Clayton, my ward by covenant, *instanter*?"

"How exceedingly obtuse you are, my dear Old Grip—and you to call yourself a detective, too! Pouf! And pray what would I remain here in New York for, during your absence, save as your representative in home affairs?"

Ned Grippon clapped his hands together and kissed her roundly on the spot.

"Just what I was thinking of!" he exclaimed. "Only I preferred to have the suggestion come from you yourself, my darling."

Luella flutteringly composed her somewhat ruffled plumage, avert the conjugal embrace.

"As I have long since intimated, my dear," she said, "if you persist in slaving at the detective profession when we are quite rich enough to do nothing but have a good time, you must be content with any amount of officious

intermeddling on my part. Well, now that the duality riddle is made easy, what am I to do?"

"I shall tell you better after Cheese-it comes back with his report. Should Aspasie have so far forestalled me as to have already pre-possessed Mr. Vanderloopen in her favor—" he paused, reflecting.

"Well, what then?" eagerly.

"Well, that would be a pretty sure sign that she is on the threshold of becoming an inmate of the widower's household—perhaps," his brow clouded, "as Marguerite's governess."

"Of course, of course! But what for me?"

"That is yet to be determined. Perhaps it would then be advisable for you to borrow a point from the enemy, and somehow obtain a foothold in the widower's household, too."

Luella clapped her hands, in her turn.

"Excellent!" she cried. "Une aventure d'intrigue, and en caractère déguisée into the bargain! Quick, tell me: Has the little Marguerite ever had a maid?"

"Not to my knowledge," and the detective smiled approvingly at his wife's enthusiasm. "In fact, I am quite certain she has never had."

"Then she will have one precious soon, my dear. Trust me for that. How would I answer for a freshly-imported English lady's-maid to order, anyway? However, you may consider that settled."

"I hope we may. But don't underrate your enemy. The Moliere Siddons is an antagonist worthy of a Lucifer."

Luella smiled complacently.

"Haven't I seen the woman? Of course. Who hasn't? Well, my dear, I just long to measure swords with her!"

"Good!"

"How long shall you be away in this Texas business?"

"Ten days at the furthest."

"Much can be done by me in that time. However, let us hope that Aspasie may not be able to introduce herself into the widower's home before your return."

"Vain hope, I am afraid."

"But in such a case, what would you do? Openly advise Mr. Vanderloopen of the woman's character?"

"And expose the dead wife's secret? No, no; it is only as a last resort that I shall feel at liberty to reveal to him the inner history of the stolen diamonds."

"But would that necessarily accompany the mere exposure of Aspasie's antecedents?"

"With a man like Mr. Vanderloopen, yes," replied Old Grip, after a pause. "Besides, if he has already seen and conversed with the woman he is by this time more or less pre-possessed in her favor."

"Under what circumstances, then, shall you feel authorized to tell Mr. Vanderloopen everything?"

"Only in the event of Marguerite's imminent peril. It seems wild, but such is my covenant with the dead."

Cheese-it returned with his report in good season.

"Well?" demanded his master.

"The lady's still in her lodgin's, boss," replied the boy.

"What else?"

"She's given notice that she won't want her rooms any more after next Monday."

"You learned no more than this?"

"No more, boss."

"Of whom did you learn this much?"

"Of a hair-dresser on ground floor of same building. His name's Fraggaponi, and he builds up ma'mzelle's hair for her when she goes to spout Shakespeare at swell entertainments. I got him to cut my hair, and pumped that much out of him, but no more. A suspicious-looking duck, that Fraggaponi, boss."

"Thank you, my lad."

"What do you infer?" asked Luella, when Cheese-it had been dismissed.

"That Aspasie has already been engaged as Marguerite's instructress, or is pretty sure of being so."

"And that she will probably remove from her present lodgings into Mr. Vanderloopen's house next Monday?"

"Yes, that is just my inference."

"Four days hence! Well, do not worry, my dear. Between now and then I shall be engaged as Miss Clayton's maid, or forestall Aspasie in some other capacity—trust your wife for that."

"You are a treasure, Luella. And, as I cannot well start for Texas before six this evening, I shall give myself the honor of making Mademoiselle Aspasie's personal acquaintance this afternoon, if possible. Now let us go to lunch."

CHAPTER X.

ASPASIE AT BAY.

AFTER bidding adieu to his wife, and securing a well-packed valise for his journey, our detective quitted the pleasant family hotel in which they found their domestic bliss, and was soon on Broadway.

Passing down this noted thoroughfare to Waverly place, he turned westward, and was

quickly before one of those fine old family mansions, in the neighborhood of Washington Square, that have been heightened by several stories, and converted into apartments and apartment-suites for fairly well-to-do bachelors and others.

It was the most expensively-furnished suite in the third floor of this house that was occupied by Mademoiselle Aspasie Molière-Siddons, as she called herself.

In one corner of the basement floor was a natty little barber shop, bearing the sign, in neat gilded letters, J. FRAGGAPONI; for, while his main income was derived from hair-dressing among such society ladies as might demand his artistic services in the line of capillary architecture, the proprietor did not disdain the humbler exercise of his calling in a general way.

Sigñor Fraggaponi was alone in his shop when Old Grip carelessly entered it and said, in French:

"Why, Jules Meurtrante, is it *you*? And how is it with the good people in New Caldonia?"

Fraggaponi, who had been strapping a razor with his back to the door, started up with a sort of leap and confronted the speaker of this strange greeting with a look of amazement and alarm.

But he almost instantly recovered his accustomed expression, which was a mixture of insolence and servility.

"Whom are you addressing?" he demanded, with an air of surprise.

"You, Froggy!"

"You mistake, sir; my name is Jules Fraggaponi. But no matter. Who the deuce are you?"

The detective put down his valise, and laid aside his hat.

"Look again!" he said, sternly. "Survey me more critically—I might say more memorizingly."

Again did the barber momentarily lose his self-possession, and, with something like a fierce gulp, he muttered, half-wonderingly, half-furiously:

"*L'Ancienne Prise Griffée!*"

The detective laughed, and then proceeded in English:

"Yes; the Old Griffin's Clutch—that in French, Jules; but only plain Old Grip here in America. But, don't be alarmed. I am not in the interest of the French criminal courts at present, and the mere fact of your being an escaped convict from New Caledonia does not concern me."

The man had made a motion to spring upon him, open razor in hand, but had thought better of it, and returned the instrument to its rack on the wall.

"My name is Fraggaponi," he growled, "and I don't know what you are talking about."

"Is your charming sister alone in her apartments, or is she there at all?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Scoundrel! *forçat!*" a pitiless deadliness had crept into the detective's voice; "answer, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Mademoiselle Aspasie is in her apartments, and alone, if that is what you mean," was the cowed, but sullen reply.

"Look to that valise till my return."

And the detective abruptly quitted the shop, contemptuously heedless of the murderous looks which he knew must be following his exit.

But he was to meet with a different customer in Aspasie, as he doubtless anticipated.

He knocked at what seemed to be the principal door of the apartments *en suite* that were pointed out to him by the janitor as hers.

"Come in!" cried a melodious voice from within.

It was her drawing-room, and she was reclining negligently on a rich divan, a cigarette between her lips, a book in her hand.

She merely looked up inquiringly as he stood in the doorway, hat in hand, regarding her intently, but with no admiration in his gaze for her splendid beauty—and she was now at her best, in a charming toilette at harmony with her lazy attitude and occupation—which was accustomed to intoxicate the beholder.

"Well, monsieur," she said, at last, with a smile, "are you not making some mistake?"

"Certainly not."

"Whom do you wish to see?"

"Rose Meurtrante, alias Purplette des Gants," and unceremoniously entering, the detective closed the door behind him, and coolly seated himself facing her.

But, after a scarcely perceptible start, she only regarded him with an amused smile, a slight shrug of the faultless shoulders, and with scarcely a change of her indolent attitude.

The detective touched one of her mittened arms—as perceived through her loose-flowing sleeves, the superbly rounded fore-arms were now clothed in flesh-colored mitts, fitting her like a skin.

"You still wear them, eh?" he observed, with a smile.

A slight shrinking back of the arm he had touched, together with a faint flushing of the rich beauty of her dark cheeks, but that was all.

"Monsieur," she calmly remarked, "I am not averse to the society of a maniac for a change—anything for a new sensation in life—but do not touch me. I might be dangerous."

"You always were."

"Who are you?"

"Honestly, Rose, have you forgotten me?"

"Honestly, yes, if I ever saw you before, which I doubt. And don't call me out of my name again, if you please, there's a good, kind lunatic! or I shall be sorely tempted to break your head with a cupid."

"At one time in Paris I was known as Old Griffin's Clutch; here in America it is Old Grip."

"Ah, indeed!" with an amused elevation of the brows; "quite romantic, quite chic. Well, Monsieur Old Grip, what do you purpose gripping here?"

"You, and with a grip that shall make you wince, unless you comply with my demands."

She threw away her cigarette and laughing musically, rose into a sitting posture.

"This is rich, decidedly rich!" she murmured. "And what would you demand, my dear maniac?"

"That you instantly relinquish your design of entering the household of the rich merchant, Mr. Calvin Vanderloopen, to become the companion-instructress of his step-daughter, Marguerite."

"Ha, ha, ha! And if I refuse?"

Before he could answer the door opened and Waldo Dysart appeared, humming a catch from the last operatic nonsense, which instantly ceased when he perceived the detective's presence.

"Retire for half an hour, *mon cher*," gayly commanded the adventuress, still laughing. "I have a little business with this gentleman."

"Mr. Dysart may remain, if he will, for all I care," said the detective.

But Aspasie made an imperative gesture and Waldo quitted the room forthwith.

Then, turning upon her visitor with unexpected fierceness, she exclaimed:

"Now!"

Old Grip smiled.

"If you refuse," he went on, "I shall simply expose your antecedents, with all their infamy, to Mr. Vanderloopen."

"You dare not!"

"And why, pray?"

She brought her face close to his, looking him steadfastly in the eyes.

"Because," she replied, in a low menacing voice, "your compact with the dead would not permit it—I would see to it that the secret of the pawned diamonds should come out with my exposure!"

The detective started, in spite of himself. How had she known of his covenant with Marguerite's mother? But he had one arrow left in his quiver.

"Say you so, Rose Meurtrante?" he replied. "But you, of all others, should most dread any publicity of the pawned diamonds secret, now!"

"And wherefore, monsieur?"

He produced, with a quickness of movement that resembled legerdemain, a heavy gold hairpin, topped with a large gold ball, which, by a strange coincidence, was the counterpart of one at that moment adorning her queenly head, and guardedly held it before her eyes.

In spite of her iron nerve, she for an instant blanched, recoiling like a beautiful wild animal at bay.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she faltered between her quivering lips; "where did you get that?"

"Close to the body of the murdered Russian Jew," answered Old Grip, "perhaps less than an hour after his assassination by—"

He paused, looking at her sternly.

"Diable! give me that—I want it!" and springing upon him like a leopard, she furiously clutched at the pin.

But she might as well have cast herself against a column of steel, and it was ever beyond her reach.

"Ha, ha, ha!" mocked the detective; "of what is all this a self-confession, Purplette of the Gloved Hands?"

CHAPTER XI.

AN ADVENTURESS'S WILES.

ASPASIE suddenly ceased battling for the gold hairpin, and, throwing herself once more upon the divan, she burst into an irritated little laugh.

"*Mon Dieu*, what a *bêtise!*" she exclaimed.

"However, it is but natural, monsieur, that I should wish to recover my property. The pin was a keepsake that was lost or stolen from me sometime during the past fortnight. See—here is its companion."

And she pulled the fellow-pin out of her coiffure, heedless of the fact that the action brought her magnificent hair tumbling down her neck and back in blue-black, glistening masses.

"Ah, it was lost or stolen from you, eh?" was the detective's ironical comment, as he slipped the pin in his possession out of sight.

"Of course, monsieur."

"Odd that it should be found so near the body of the murdered Russian Jew!"

"Granted—that is, if it really was so, which seems to me too preposterous for belief. But aren't you going to give it back to me, Monsieur Lunatique?"

"By no means."

"Keep it, then. It isn't worth while calling in the police for such a trifle."

"It would be hardly worth *your* while to call in the police on any occasion whatever."

"Monsieur, I am weary." She lighted a fresh cigarette. "Oblige me by taking your insanity elsewhere."

Old Grip arose in secret chagrin, for time was pressing with him, and there was no denying that, in view of his promise to the dead Althea Vanderloopen with regard to the pawning of the diamonds, the adventuress could safely defy him, at least for the time being.

"How did you learn of my having made any compact?" he roughly demanded.

For answer, she slightly shrugged her shapely shoulders and laughed in his face.

"Am I to understand then, Rose Meurtrante, that you defy me from this time forth?"

"Rose Meurtrante! What a murderous name! and who can she be? Monsieur Lunatique, yonder is the door."

He quitted her without another word, regardless of the low taunting laugh that followed him; and, an hour later, after dispatching to Luella a brief note, explanatory of the resultless interview, was on a southward-bound train.

No sooner was he out of the room than Aspasie sprung to her feet, her beautiful features convulsed, an expression of hatred and alarm, and began to pace the floor with clinched hands and heaving bosom.

"Diable! who would have expected it?—this iron-visaged specter from the old wild days I had fondly deemed as good as buried!" she muttered. "If—but no matter. Iron, though he may be, he may yet find that his is not alone the vulture grip—that there is defiance and even death for him in the clutch of the gloved hands!" And she raised her strong but beautiful hands and arms—at least they should have been beautiful underneath the skin-tight silken mitts—with a revengeful, working movement.

Then she ran to the window, and was just in time to see the detective hurrying away from the hair-dresser's shop, portmanteau in hand.

"Ha! he is going away on some journey. That is why he did not hold me longer at bay. Good! Let him give me but a week's immunity, and I shall safely defy him from my throne in the rich merchant's heart."

She touched the bell, and the hair-dresser was speedily before her.

"The detective! He spoke with you before coming up to me?"

"Sapristi! yes. How cheerfully I could have stabbed him in the back! The idea of Old Griffin's Grip, as we called him in Paris, turning up just when—"

"No matter. Tell me what passed, that is all."

Fraggaponi did so.

"It is well," briefly commented Aspasie. "At least, it might be worse."

"What shall you do?"

"Leave it all to me. We are no longer in Paris, thank God! or we might count ourselves as lost. Whatever change I shall make, you will retain your present quarters on the ground floor."

"Have you yet been engaged as the young lady's instructress?"

"Not quite; but doubtless will be before morning. Come up at six to dress my hair. Begone now, Jules; that is young Dysart's step upon the stair."

And the hair-dresser made his escape just as Waldo put in a reappearance.

"Did you bring me the bonbons?" asked Aspasie, as the young man seated himself in a humor that was evidently none of the best.

He handed her a box of confectionery rather sulkily, and then, while she broke it open, gave a forced laugh.

"What on earth could that detective want of you?" he asked.

"Have you forgotten those unfortunate diamonds, cheri?" she laughed, with a bonbon between her teeth. "Well, he has not, if you have."

"But my uncle no longer takes any special interest in their recovery. Besides, the detective knows that the *parure* in your possession is nothing more than imitation."

"Does he? Well, he's after the true set, which disappeared, it seems, from the Russian Jew's strong-box at the time of the murder."

"But my uncle is still ignorant of that. It was his wife's secret, which you and I share with the detective."

"So does Nadka, for that matter."

"Of course; and it is easy to see how Old Grip can keep her mouth shut, as my uncle could mulct her estate for their full value, did he but guess the truth."

"Well, that explains why the detective is anxious to recover the property, instead of mulcting the Jewess, and thus exposing your lamented aunt's indiscretion."

"True; and the diamonds would doubtless be-

come Marguerite's. This would be in keeping with the detective's covenant with my aunt."

"Ah, that covenant, that precious compact! It was lucky your little chambermaid overheard it being made, my dear."

"Why?"

"Oh, it was well enough to be prepared."

"That is true. But you haven't given me any of the particulars of the detective's visit."

"They're not worth recounting. Come here and you shall kiss me, my dear." She made room for him at her side, which he eagerly availed himself of, though still dissatisfied by her explanations. "Now for more interesting matter. Are you to take me to see your uncle at his house this evening?"

"Yes; my uncle rose to the proposition like a trout to a fly."

"Then his first impression of me was not a displeasing one?"

Waldo had contrived the introduction at a down-town restaurant two days previous.

"Displeasing! Good Lord!" There was something fiercely discontented in the young man's voice and manner; "I should say not."

Aspasie laughed.

"What!" in pretended surprise; "you don't mean that I was really so fortunate as to possess monsieur of the uncomputed millions?"

"How innocent we are, to be sure!" sulkily. "Where is there the man that you wouldn't or couldn't prepossess, I should like to know?"

She kissed him roundly, which somewhat restored his good humor.

"But tell me of it, my dear. You see, I really thought monsieur your uncle still inconsolable, his thoughts clothed with funereal black, as it were, over his bereavement."

"They're out in only half-mourning since day before yesterday."

"You tell me that?"

"Yes, I do."

"And he will decide to have me chaperon the little Marguerite?"

"After this evening he will, without a doubt. As for Marguerite herself, you won her heart the day I brought her here, though she in some vague way connects the incident with her mother's death."

"Ah, *la pauvre petite!* We shall get along nicely. She has no confidante now, I suppose—no favorite maid or companion, or anything of that sort?"

"No; though, of course, she could have anything she was a mind to ask for."

"Ah!" with a peculiar smile.

"Aspasie!" suddenly exclaimed the young man, after a moment of clouded thought.

"Well, my dear?"

"If you might be contemplating throwing me over for my uncle—if I should think you capable of such treacherous baseness—"

She interrupted him with a burst of derisive laughter and an embrace.

"What an idea to put in my head, you silly boy!" she exclaimed. "Run along now, and return for me at seven. I shall need all the time till then to make myself ready for the conquest of—the little Marguerite."

"What shall you read for them?" and rising, Waldo picked up his hat.

"Shakespeare, of course, since you say your uncle knows nothing of French. However, I might do a little of Racine or Corneille to test the young lady's proficiency. But leave all that to me."

CHAPTER XII.

MARGUERITE TO BE EQUIPPED FOR SOCIETY.

MR. VANDERLOOPEN had invited several of his whist-cronies—retired business men of his own sort—to meet Mlle. Moliere-Siddons at his house, the recentness of his domestic bereavement not admitting of his making more of a party, as perhaps he would like to have done.

Indeed, there may have been those of his guests, as it was, who secretly deemed the thing rather worse than merely unconventional; but then it was generally understood that the foreign lady might become an inmate of the house as Marguerite's instructress-guide; and moreover, Aspasie had by this time become quite the vogue in high society entertainments, without a breath as yet against her character, and her recommendations from London and elsewhere abroad were supposed to be of the best.

So the thing went.

Aspasie was really a superb reader of English, notwithstanding a slight foreign accent that rather enhanced her effects than otherwise, while her beauty was so exceptional as to constitute her little less than a marvel, especially with the sterner sex.

Moreover, on this occasion, though the temptation to coquetry, in view of the almost exclusive masculinity of her auditory, was very great, her performance was marked by a modest womanliness, not to say severity of demeanor or that was doubly enchanting to Mr. Vanderloopen especially.

The widower had been thoroughly saddened by his bereavement, and this was just the guise in which fresh beauty and life could best appeal to his instincts and sensations.

Aspasie had just finished a very pathetic read-

ing, and, having swept across the floor to a seat at Marguerite's side, was speaking to the young girl earnestly in her melodious sympathetic voice, with now and then a word or an upward glance for Mr. Vanderloopen or Waldo Dysart, who were hovering over her at either side.

"Gad! but I imagine that Van's widowerhood will break moorings in short order now," whispered to his nearest neighborhood Captain Marshall, a rich retired sea-captain and ship-owner, who had long been one of Mr. Vanderloopen's intimates.

"Oh, it doesn't follow, inexpressibly lovely as the lady unquestionably is," returned the other, Mr. Westbury, an old banker, deemed about the best whist-player at the club to which they all belonged and himself a widower of but two years' standing. "It is quite known that young Dysart is completely 'gone' on the lady, as they say nowadays."

"Gauh!" derisively; "and without a cent in the world save as Van's prospective heir! Long she'd be in choosing between the two!"

"But the lady hardly looks to be thirty, while Van must be pushing the sixties hard."

"With his millions behind him, and a well-preserved man, to boot. I only wish," in a yet lower voice, "it was my daughter she was to chaperon, though Arabella herself is thirty, if she's a day."

"Here, too!"

And then they both laughed, for Captain Marshall was also a widower, and Aspasie was at that moment looking specially ravishing.

The three remaining gentlemen guests likewise had their heads together, doubtless to the exposition of comments of a similar nature.

"Then you will kindly undertake the finishing education of Marguerite, mademoiselle?" Mr. Vanderloopen was saying; and, seeing the adventuress seemingly hesitate, he added, hurriedly, in a voice inaudible to either the young girl or Waldo: "It shall be worth your while, and the house shall be practically at your command."

After one melting glance, Aspasie lowered her magnificent eyes, to conceal her satisfaction, her hand softly caressing one of Marguerite's.

"I am quite sure Mademoiselle Aspasie will not hesitate to make the sacrifice, uncle," interposed Waldo, adding softly in Aspasie's ear, "For my sake, too, you know."

Aspasie looked at Marguerite, who was looking positively enchanted.

"And *la petite cherie?*" she queried. "What does she say?"

The young girl flushed with pleasure, her innocent blue eyes brightening naively.

"Oh, ma'am!" with a loving and trustful glance; "how can you ask?"

The shadow of her mother's death was still somewhat darkening the girl's sensitive nature; but she was only seventeen, full of health and hope, and Aspasie was the most beautiful and fascinating creature she had ever seen—quite an ideal lady out of a novel, she said, to herself.

"Then we may regard it as settled, I hope?" said the widower, eagerly—a little too eagerly on such short acquaintance, Waldo thought, with a sort of ominous pang.

Aspasie seemed to hesitate. Still she had to confess that she had but few readings promised that could not be expedited, or perhaps canceled; and—with a pathetic look, now at the uncle, now at the nephew—the prospect of rest and a home, apart from the excitements to which she had been so long accustomed, and yet of which she was so wearied, so dissatisfied, was not without its soothing charm.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Vanderloopen, delighted; "Rita's future is as good as secured. We can come to pecuniary terms afterward," apologetically, as if ashamed to so much as hint of money remuneration in the transaction with such a superior being. "There's nothing like taking time by the forelock, ma'am. Suppose you come to-morrow."

"Oh, no; that would be altogether too sudden, too abrupt. To-morrow would be Friday, too—an unlucky day. Still Mademoiselle Aspasie might so arrange her Bohemian affairs ("I am a Bohemian, you know, Mr. Vanderloopen," she archly interpolated, "in spite of whatever prejudice you may have against the classification") as to come Monday, with an effort to induct herself amid the conventionalities to which, she admitted with charming candor, she was almost wholly a stranger.

"Then it is a settled thing," said Mr. Vanderloopen, genially, while young Dysart smiled his satisfaction a little less pronouncedly. "Rita, my dear," to Marguerite, who was blushing with pleasure, "you should be satisfied now. A mentor like Mademoiselle Aspasie, and a lady's maid all to yourself, and almost at the same time! Why, you'll be thoroughly equipped, my love!"

Aspasie had imperceptibly started.

"Ah, and you have a maid, *petite?*" sweetly to Marguerite. "I had not thought of that; and yet still what would you do without one?"

Mr. Vanderloopen interposed to say that the maid had not yet been engaged, but perhaps would be. That very afternoon a comely and seemingly capable young Englishwoman, with

some excellent recommendations, had applied for such a position.

"What do you think of my assurance, mademoiselle?" continued the widower, with a laugh. "Rita was taken with the young woman, and would have had me engage her on the spot. But I deferred my answer till to-morrow until you could have passed on her efficiency."

"I!" exclaimed Aspasie, in unaffected surprise.

"Yes, I was bold enough to assume that you would consent to take Rita in charge; and the young woman will make bold to call upon you in the morning."

Aspasie expressed herself as highly complimented, while mentally resolving that the aspirant would have to prove of her sort to obtain the privilege of being Rita's maid, with all the intimacy that the office implied, and managed to obtain some particulars as to the young woman and her application.

Then she suffered Marguerite to lead her to the piano, where the twain sung a duet very prettily. Aspasie had an agreeable but not extraordinary voice, which she could manage very well in vocalization, though nothing to compare with her powers as an elocutionist, while Marguerite, she was quite sure, would sing really capably when more mature and better able to produce her voice.

Then there was another reading, and the evening was at an end, to the scarcely concealed envy of Mr. Vanderloopen's cronies, married or single, when it became generally known that Aspasie would become a permanency in the house, as Rita's preceptress.

"Now, my dear boy, you must get over your absurd jealousies, and leave everything to me from this time forth, or you and I shall seriously quarrel." Aspasie was saying some last words to Waldo Dysart at the door of her lodgings, whither he had escorted her. "The case is just this, as I understand it. You are ultimately to marry the little girl, get with her a stunning share of the old man's ready money, as a reward for your obedience, besides remaining his heir; then the old gentleman may die unexpectedly," with a peculiar look. "After that you and I are to up and away with the millions, leaving the little one in the lurch. Am I right as to the programme?"

"I suppose so," was the young man's half-appalled reply.

"Kiss me good-night then," she drew back still deeper in the vestibule, "and live in hope for what the future may hold for you and me."

As he did so, and reluctantly tore himself away, she looked after him with a low laugh, before fitting her night-key into the door, whose treacherous significance might have been even patent to his silly and glamourd understanding, had it reached his ears.

As it was, the laugh and the cajoling words preceding it were not lost upon a slight, alert figure—the figure of Old Grip's sprite-like assistant, Cheese-it—that slipped from its place of concealment behind one of the heavy outer doors, and disappeared as the adventuress vanished within the dimly-lit corridor.

As for Aspasie, immediately on gaining her rooms, and while preparing to retire, she summoned the hair-dresser, who seemed to have little else to do than to await her bidding."

"There will be a young Englishwoman to see me in the morning. Observe her narrowly for a chance recognition, as she might possibly be a spy."

"Eh, bien, yes. You will go to the rich man's house Monday, then?"

"Yes."

"Aha! And might I perhaps dress your little young lady's hair occasionally, with a chance of picking up some unconsidered trifles?"

"Not to be thought of, though I may have other use for you there. Go, now, Jules, as I am tired and sleepy."

CHAPTER XIII.

VERY ENGLISH, YOU KNOW.

"Ah! and are you Sarah Jenkins?" asked Aspasie, with no little surprise, when the would-be lady's maid was ushered into her presence shortly after the late breakfast on the following morning.

Luella had gotten herself up admirably for the occasion. The beauty of her blonde face, abundant golden hair and superb figure were, of course, in a great measure undisguisable. But in dress, grin and pertness, she was the embodiment of the conceited, yet unsophisticated Cockney waiting-maid out of a job; and, added to this, for the present occasion especially, there was in her general air an ill-concealed, leering sort of eagerness, suggestive of reckless unprincipledness on demand, that at once agreeably prepossessed the adventuress in her favor.

"Yes'um," she replied, with a smart courtesy. "I'm Sarah Jenkins, mum, at your service, mum."

"But, should you become Miss Clayton's maid, it is at her service, not at mine, you would be."

The pseudo Sarah Jenkins smirked, and, having already helped herself to a chair, she drew it a little closer to Aspasie, who was lounging on her divan, after her usual luxurious custom.

"Well, I don't know 'ow that might be, mum,"

she said, sinking her purposely coarsened voice. "She's such a little innocent, mum, and—ham I right, mum, in 'aving thought that you are going to be a sort of guardian over the young lady, mum?"

"Yes."

Miss Jenkins winked, nodded her head and smirked yet more confidentially.

"I'm not in the 'abit of getting up very late in the morning, mum. I rather think I'd know ooze histerest to serve principally in that big 'ouse, mum."

So far, so good, barring somewhat, perhaps, the Londoner's superlative good looks; though Aspasie remembered that both uncle and nephew were likewise pronounced blondes, for that matter.

"Have you been long in this city?" she asked.

"Honly six weeks, mum; and the noise and bustle of it still distresses my nerves. I'll happen to better hadvantage, I 'ope, when I get more used to it."

"But it is nothing to compare to London in that respect," observed Aspasie, in no little surprise.

"If you please, mum, though born in London, I was mostly lady's-maid in county families w'at lived altogether in the country—the very best families, mum."

"Ah, I see; and then our middays are warmer than you have been accustomed to."

"Ho!" with comical desperateness; "it isn't so much the eat, you know, mum, as this bloody 'ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer on the 'ard 'igh road. That's w'at un'inges and hagitates the nervous henergies, mum."

And, picking up a newspaper, Miss Jenkins fanned herself airily.

Aspasie burst out laughing.

"Still," she said, controlling herself, "what am I to know as to your capacity, Jenkins?"

"My what, mum—my rapacity?" with a stare.

"Not exactly," replied Aspasie, laughing afresh, "though you might have sufficient of that, too. I mean your ability. You see, Miss Clayton, being still quite young, has never been indulged in the luxury of a lady's-maid heretofore, and, though Mr. Vanderloopen assured me that you had presented him some unexceptionable recommendations, I would be sure of your qualifications to wait upon the young lady properly, no less than of—ur—your moral character."

Sarah, who had been studying the adventuress's beauty during the delivery of these remarks, gravely nodded and said:

"I understand you at last, mum."

Then she coolly rose and began to discard her cheap bonnet and thread gloves with business-like alertness.

"Parbleu!" exclaimed Aspasie; "what are you going to do, Jenkins?"

"I notice your 'air, mum."

"My—oh, my hair?"

"Yes'um. I observe as it's in a manner tousled and dis'evelled, as if you 'adn't been long hout of bed, mum."

"Very likely."

"I'm going to do it up for you, mum, besides hassing you at your morning toilette. Then you can see whether I'm hable or not at my professional business, mum."

Aspasie laughed again.

"Eh bien, you may come into my dressing-room, then," she assented, rising. "I shall appoint my regular hair-dresser for this once, Jenkins, and see what you amount to."

During the rather prolonged operation of the toilette-making the adventuress was treated to fresh agreeable surprises with regard to the aspirant for Marguerite Clayton's confidential service.

Of course it was not real moral character that she was anxious about, and she seemed to get just what she wanted.

The pseudo-lady's-maid proved to be amiably loquacious, and, to all appearances, delightfully vicious. While flitting officiously about Aspasie's beautiful person, she poured into her ears any amount of tittle-tattle, apparently culled at second-hand from the scandals of London and elsewhere.

"Diable!" exclaimed Aspasie at last. "Why, my dear young woman, you could give points to Asmodeus himself."

Jenkins grinned a little bewilderedly.

"Whatever was 'ee like, mum?" she asked.

"Oh, it doesn't much matter. But, candidly, Jenkins, how can I recommend a person of your experiences and inclinations for lady's-maid to an innocent young *ingenue* like Miss Marguerite?"

Jenkins clasped her hands and gazed at the adventuress's beauty adoringly.

"Oh, mum!" she exclaimed; "but won't it just be your admirable self that I'll really serve? That for the young lady," with a snap of the fingers, "or w'atever you may secretly order."

The toilette was by this time completed.

"Come back into the next room," said Aspasie, leading the way. "Take a seat yonder for a moment."

And then, touching the bell for Fraggaponi, she stepped out of the room, carefully closing

the door behind her, to meet him in the corridor.

"Who did up your hair?" he demanded. "Surely you could never have effected that coil with your own hands."

"Never mind that. You observed the English woman now with me?"

"Narrowly."

"Had you ever seen her before?"

"Never."

"How did she impress you?"

"As something of a she-devil on occasion, in spite of her good looks."

"That will do," and dismissing him, Aspasie re-entered the rooms.

"My dear, I fancy you will do," she said to the counterfeit lady's-maid, sweetly. "I shall give you a line to Mr. Vanderloopen to that effect." She began writing with a pencil on the back of one of her visiting cards, saying: "You will enter upon your duties to-day?"

"Yes, 'um, if you've no objection."

"I! Oh, no!" Then, very slowly, while giving the address: "I think you and I will understand each other, Jenkins."

For answer the latter seized both of the shapely hands, with their skin-tight mitts, and kissed them effusively.

"You're just the beatifullest and most hangelic lady in the world!" she exclaimed, "and I shall be your 'appy slave, mum! You're like a tropical flower in the moonlight!"

But this did not prevent her sending the following dispatch, an hour later, to San Antonio, for Old Grip's relief immediately on his arrival there:

"Am already in the Swim. To-day makes me a lady's-maid, and she believes in me. LUILLA."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE RICH MAN'S HOUSE.

"You read fairly well already, my dear, and you have the groundwork for an excellent deportment."

So spoke Aspasie, it being at the close of her first day at Mr. Vanderloopen's, and she and Marguerite having just returned from an afternoon's drive.

Marguerite flushed with pleasure. If she had been fascinated with her preceptress's beauty from the first, she was now in love with her amiability and good-nature. And it might be some time, too, before the tigress would unsheathe her claws.

"Oh, you are so kind to say that, mademoiselle!" the young girl replied. "But then mamma"—the sweet voice trembled—"was very careful of my behavior, when—when," indulgently, "she found time to look after me personally, you know."

Aspasie frowned inwardly. She was doing something of the maternal role herself, but did not like any allusion to the girl's own mother.

"Your mamma must have been an adorably sweet woman, from what I hear," she remarked, "although a very fashionable woman."

"She was the sweetest, the best of mammas!" exclaimed Marguerite, with tears in her eyes.

"Even when I would pout and be ugly because she wouldn't take me to the races with her, she would only kiss and pet me. Once she gave me a new pony. It was just after she had won a good deal of money on King's Own."

"It isn't well for young girls to attend races, my dear," and Marguerite laughed.

"Then why is it well for other girls, or women, to attend them?"

"Well—ur—married society ladies have certain privileges. Tell me, then," hastily, "you must have grown up pretty much at your own sweet will, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! I was at boarding-school till I was fifteen—and I have had two governesses."

"And I am the third, eh?"

"Why, no, mademoiselle!" surprisedly. "You are a lady of the world, who has merely consented to finish me off, and at no little sacrifice to your own brilliant prospects. Papa said so."

Aspasie flushed with secret pleasure.

"Your papa said that, did he?"

"Yes; he was careful to impress me with it. And I am so glad," impulsively throwing her arms around her companion's neck, and kissing her. "You don't know how glad I am it is so."

Aspasie had no liking for the caresses of innocence, though she managed to respond to this one without being positively chilling.

"Why are you glad, my dear?"

"Because," naively, "I may make you love me almost as much as poor mamma did. Besides, you are so beautiful!"

"No, no!"

"Oh, but every one says so! Waldo can do nothing but look at you, and papa says you are altogether the most beautiful and attractive woman he ever saw or heard of."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed, mademoiselle!"

"But aren't you a bit jealous," with a circumspect smile, "that young Mr. Dysart should look at me, as you say he does?"

"Jealous of Waldo?" in surprise.

"Well, he is to marry you one day, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," listlessly. "Yes," slowly and

resignedly, "six months hence, on the day I am eighteen."

"*Ma pauvre petite!* you do not seem particularly overjoyed at the prospect."

"Oh, but I suppose what must be will be! But then his marrying me will make him papa's heir, you know; and, besides, I shall then have twenty thousand dollars in my own right from my Grandfather Clayton's estate."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Besides, Waldo," doubtfully, "is nice enough—in his way."

"Not exactly your way—eh, *petite*?"

"I don't care so much for light young men; I much prefer dark ones. Perhaps," brightly, "it's because I'm rather blonde myself. Mightn't that be so?"

"Very possibly."

"Besides, Waldo isn't—isn't sentimental at all. I don't believe he ever reads anything but the newspapers. Why, there's even John; he reads books all the time he can spare from his work. And he can talk so interestingly about them, too. And, somehow or other, he reads just the kind of books I like to read—sweet novels and love-tales, you know. Funny, isn't it?"

"Perhaps so; but who is John, my dear?"

"You saw him this afternoon—John Meadows, our coachman."

Aspasie brightened up.

"Ah! and a good-looking young fellow, too."

"Isn't he, though?"

"And one of the 'dark ones,' too, or my observation was at fault?"

"Yes; and with the loveliest soft black eyes! John also attends me as my groom when I ride in the Park. He is scintillant and respectful. I sometimes suspect he might be an English nobleman in disguise."

"Nonsense!" with assumed severity. "Nothing of the sort! But, of course, you would never dream of forgetting the difference in your social positions while conversing with a coachman, my love?"

"Oh, of course not!" with a sigh. "John Meadows is always very respectful—exceedingly respectful. But," stealing a timid look up at her preceptor's face, "Mademoiselle Aspasie?"

"Well, *cherie*?"

"Don't you believe in love, in true love, above everything else, and under almost all circumstances?"

Aspasie had been thinking. Nothing might ultimately better suit her designs than for Marguerite to elope with a coachman. It would eliminate both Waldo and her out of the prospective millions, and leave the widower as a mellowed fruit ready to her hand. But she must go slow.

"No, my child," she replied, catching the young girl in her arms in an artificially protective embrace, "not quite under all circumstances. Promise me this, at all events—always to make a confidante of me."

"Oh, I am glad to promise you that, Aspasie, how perfectly beautiful you are! I wish I was dark, like you, instead of fair. But no, I don't, either; for then—"

She did not complete the sentence, but paused with a troubled blush, which was sufficiently suggestive in view of what had gone before.

"Did your mamma know, my dear, of your indifference to Mr. Dysart?"

"Mamma and Waldo were not the best friends," replied Marguerite, gravely. "And, somehow, toward the last, after the theft of the diamonds, they seemed to like each other less than ever."

The diamonds were a subject that Aspasie was more than willing to avoid for the time being.

"You haven't told me how you get on with your maid?" she remarked.

"Very nicely. Don't you think her uncommonly pretty?"

"Passably so."

"She seems very capable and nice. One thing I especially like her for."

"What is that?"

"She seems so fond of you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and she seems never tired of sounding praises of your beauty and goodness. But that reminds me—she must be helping me to dress for dinner." They were in the two pretty rooms devoted to Marguerite exclusively, and she touched the bell. "How funny it seems to have some one at my beck and call! Sha'n't Jenkins do up your hair, Aspasie, after she finishes with me?"

"No; Signor Fraggaponi will wait on me every day hereafter for that purpose."

"What! the man hair-dresser who is so fashionable?"

Aspasie nodded, and then Jenkins appeared so promptly in response to the summons as to narrowly escape the suspicion of having been eavesdropping—as in truth she had been.

"Ah, mum! and isn't it just 'eavenly?" exclaimed Jenkins, a few moments later. She was combing out Marguerite's long fair hair, which was really very abundant, considering her youth, and had turned a look askance at Aspasie, who was thoughtfully contemplating the

young girl's pretty neck and shoulders as unconsciously revealed in the innocent undress of the occasion. "Talk of hangels of innocence and 'ouris of 'armony, you know, but where would they be so far as the 'air is concerned, mum? Why, there was Lady Arriet and Lady Hemeline, Lord Whinelsea's two daughters, what I hattened at about Miss Clayton's hage—they was twins, mum, an' as like as two peas in a pod—their 'air couldn't 'old a penny candle to this 'ead of 'air of my present young lady's; an' they was esteemed court beauties, with half the young sprigs of the country-side a-committin' suicide and fighting juels in their be'alf!"

Marguerite twisted aside her head from the caressing comb, and burst into such a peal of laughter as she hadn't known since her mother's death.

But at this instant a servant appeared, saying that Mr. Vanderloopen would like to see Mademoiselle Aspasie in the passage.

"How do you find Marguerite, ma'm?" asked the widower, with thinly disguised anxiety, as soon as the two were alone. "I really do hope you will be able to make something out of the child."

Aspasie replied encouragingly, and then they passed up and down the long, rather dimly-lighted up-stairs corridor quite confidentially.

"We seem to be getting along amazingly," muttered the disguised Luella, popping her head out of the door to perceive them, unperceived. "Well, well; I do hope my husband won't be long away."

CHAPTER XV. OLD GRIP ON DECK.

FORTUNATELY, Old Grip's Texas business only kept him absent from the city a day or two over the week.

By appointment, Luella, having obtained half a day off from her lady's-maid's duties, was on hand to receive him at their hotel immediately on his return.

After the first lover-like congratulations—for they had not ceased to be lovers since their bridal morn—Grippon held her off at arm's length, and then burst into laughter at the transformation she had effected in the accustomed stylish set-off of her exceptional blonde beauty and graciousness, for she was still in character, so to speak.

"Oh, you need not laugh at me, if I ham hout at service, young man!" she exclaimed, in a pretend d'hoof, and in her broadest Cockney dialect and manner. "None of your himperance now! I'd 'ave you know I'm a honest woman, if I ham but a lady's-maid, and I heat with the 'ousekeeper and hupper servants, too, I'd 'ave you know."

Old Grip only laughed the louder at this, after kissing her roundly.

"But this Texas business!" cried his wife, in her natural voice; "it is finished, and you are back here with me for good?"

"Yes; or for bad. You might have guessed as much from my last letter, my dear. However, you can now consider me permanently on deck in the Vanderloopen-Molière Siddons affair. It was deuced clever, the way you rung yourself in so promptly upon the field of intrigue."

"Thank you, my love. You will have to come in upon it, too, and in a somewhat similar capacity."

"Willingly, but how?"

"You will readily discover when you shall have learned the particulars of my experience as Miss Clayton's maid."

"Excellent! let me have them."

"In the first place, read that."

She handed him a small book, with some of its pages closely written, which proved to be her diary. The writing comprised the following notes:

"First Day.—Began service. Marguerite is a little angel of innocence and sentimentality, whom it is easy to please in everything. She fights shy of Dysart, who in his turn is by no means occupied with her image. Mr. V. seems disturbed at this, though more or less preoccupied himself. I am assigned to room with the housekeeper, Mrs. Blunt—a good old soul. The only other servants worth mentioning: Bloker, the butler, a burly Englishman over-fond of the bottle—a secret toper; John Meadows, the coachman, a dapper young fellow, swarthy, black-eyed, capable, and with a quiet assurance of manner that is somewhat mysterious. Bloker has already honored me with an ogle and a smirk.

"Second Day.—Saturday—Marguerite a little darling. With her most of the day. High words between uncle and nephew at dinner-table, after M. has retired. Half suspect the cause to be Mademoiselle Aspasie, who is to come Monday, but am not quite certain. Bloker is improving on acquaintance. Ventured to chuck me under the chin, and got a box on the ear that staggered him for his pains. Mrs. Blunt turns out to be a faith cure believer—quite interesting, if not diverting. John Meadows reads highly-seasoned novels and story-papers.

"Third Day—Sunday:—Sabbatarianism is not oppressive in the Vanderloopen household.

Mr. V. spends the morning in church, the afternoon and evening at his club. Marguerite teaches an infant class in the Sunday-school, and then goes driving in the Park, or reads novels—same kind as John Meadows's—in undress. Waldo has his breakfast—a sort of pick-me-up, I should say—in bed, and then sallies out 'to see a man,' or perhaps Aspasie. Faith Cure Mrs. Blunt more decidedly interesting than ever. On her knees half the time for her tooth-ache or rheumatism, only to be on them again upon the speedy recurrence of the pangs as her imagination cools. Seems really disconsolate that I havn't any ailment to pray to one side, and thus become a believer. Bloker, the butler, unctuously drunk in the evening. Has forgotten his box on the ear, and is yet more pronouncedly attentive, spite of Norah the cook's jealousy, to whom, it appears, he was more than attentive before my arrival. A complaint of mine to Miss Marguerite, and thence, somewhat softened, to her step-father, brought the fellow a reprimand, with a warning. N. B.—Bloker can doubtless be discharged at any time at my option, leaving his place open for O. G.—John Meadows, coachman, not so much a mystery as formerly. In love with his young mistress, Miss Clayton. As for the young lady's sentiments—?

"Fourth Day—Monday:—Aspasie at last. Uncle and nephew almost fight for the honor of first receiving her with becoming *éclat*. Former triumphant, latter giving way with an appropriate glare. Uncle evidently already smitten beyond redemption, though perhaps hardly aware of it himself. Beauty of the woman certainly ravishing, but equaled by her ability and cunning. Her primary lessons in deportment, etc., strikingly clever. Marguerite fascinated, while I am of course the adventuress's secret and but too willing confederate—in her estimation. Marguerite returns the coachman's devotion, or is half-ready to. Overheard conversation between her and Aspasie after their return from afternoon drive. Aspasie will abet her in a disgraceful elopement when her plans, which are sufficiently transparent, call for such action. V. is growing tenderly confidential already, with Marguerite's welfare as the excuse. Waldo distant, savage and watchful. A. endeavors to placate him on the sly, but cannot succeed for long, unless she is content to go slower with uncle. Bloker had to be stood off with another box on the ear—with my clinched hand this time, in a way that made him hop. Went to the cook for consolation, and napped a dipper of dish-water full in the face. Must manage to keep him in situation till O. G.'s return. Housekeeper notices his persecution, and says I can pray him into hopeless disgrace with Mr. V., if I only have faith. Tell her I will think seriously of it, but really have more faith in the natural development of events. Waldo comes home late at night, looking troubled and dismayed. Jealousy or fresh gambling debts? Perhaps both. Aspasie grants him a *tête-a-tête* in the library. Can't make out what is said, but he goes off to bed in a better frame of mind. She is doubtless preparing for his elimination, no less than Marguerite's.

"Fifth Day—Tuesday:—Nothing particular (a rainy day), except an awkward allusion, through a naive inadvertence of Marguerite's, to Aspasie's perpetual mitts at lunch. I was waiting on table, by reason of Bloker being sick abed—i. e.: doubtless getting over his last night's secret booze in the pantry. Aspasie colored, laughed, then affected a romantically mysterious air, and vaguely hinted of a certain vow in her girlhood, by which her forearms, wrists and hand-backs were dedicated from mortal view forevermore. Waldo listless, Marguerite deeply impressed, V. more interested than ever before. N. B.—She must wash them daily, if not oftener, and if I can only surprise her with the mitts off! Am curious enough myself.

"Sixth Day—Wednesday:—V. outdriving with preceptor and pupil morning and afternoon. And the last wife not six weeks dead! Waldo frightfully jealous. A reading before select party of friends in the evening. Widower gradually making a more pronounced fool of himself every day. Waldo growing haggard; probably giving himself up unrestrainedly to drink and gambling. I caught Marguerite exchanging handkerchief signals with John Meadows. Bloker again becoming annoying. Hope I sha'n't be compelled to have him bounced before O. G.'s return: Mrs. Blunt kneeling in odd corners and praying for everybody, but with her toothache as the pet objective point.

"Seventh day—Thursday:—For the first time Aspasie began to sound me seriously to-day. Gave her about what she wanted. Perhaps she is contemplating a *coup*, and that speedily. Have had to enter downright complaint of Bloker, who has consequently received a last warning from V. that a repetition of his offense will cause his instant discharge. Waldo in fresh trouble of some sort—seeking secret advice from Aspasie. Marguerite in feverishly high spirits. N. B.—She rode horseback in the Park, accompanied solely by John Meadows as her attendant."

Old Grip looked up from his perusal of the diary with a nod of satisfaction.

"And to-day is the eighth day!" he exclaimed. "Good! My dear Luella, you are a perfect brick!"

And he forthwith began to rummage a certain wardrobe containing his paraphernalia for various disguises.

Luella clapped her hands.

"Excellent!" she cried. "You are going to fit yourself for taking Bloker's place on the spot?"

"Just so, my dear."

"Ah, you must show up with your application just after dinner. The butler is sure to be impudently drunk then, and I shall see that things are brought to a timely crisis."

Just here Cheese-it, who had been advised of his master's return, presented himself.

"You know that chap, Fraggaponi?" said the boy, when his greetings had been received and reciprocated.

"What of him?" demanded the detective.

"He was hanging around our office-building all day yesterday, making all sorts of inquiries."

CHAPTER XVI.

OUT AND IN.

"OHO!" ejaculated Old Grip, looking up from the articles which he had been selecting from the contents of the wardrobe. "Fraggaponi, eh?"

"Yes, boss," replied Cheese-it.

"And was yesterday his first nosing about our office building?"

"The first to my knowledge, boss."

"Did he interview you personally?"

"No, sir; though he doubtless recognized me, and took himself off directly afterward."

"Who did he interview, then?"

"The janitor and his assistant, together with several of our neighbors in the building."

"About me?"

"Altogether about you, boss, and where you had gone, and when you would be likely to return, and so on."

"And what information did the fellow obtain?"

"Just what I had taken the precaution, boss, to prime 'em all, in anticipation of some such inquiries."

"And that was?"

"That you were gone to England, but hoped to return inside of six months."

"Cheese it, my lad, you're a little trump! But that goes without saying, in view of your fidelity and shrewdness in the past. Your precaution in my behalf was the best in the world, and fitly supplied my own neglect."

"Here, my dear," interposed the detective's wife, handing the boy a dollar. "This is over and above the wages my husband gives you, and you can take your choice of the theaters to night."

The mouse-colored youth grinned and scraped his foot, as he fobbed the coin.

It was then explained to him that his master would doubtless be an inmate of the Vanderloopen establishment for some time to come, in the capacity of its butler, and, after sundry other instructions of a confidential nature, looking to his future usefulness, the lad was sent back rejoicing to the detective's down-townden.

Then Old Grip turned to Luella.

"By the way, my dear," he observed, "it just strikes me that you haven't once referred to Fraggaponi in your diary."

Luella smiled.

"Had I continued it," she replied, "for this the eighth day, I must necessarily have done so."

"Ah!"

"Yes; he presented himself at the house for the first time this morning, for the purpose of dressing Aspasie's hair. I suppose she has gone to him on the preceding days, as occasion required, not wishing to put on too much style at the outset."

"So!"

"Tell me, Ned, the man is her brother, is he not?"

"Yes, and as murderous a hound as ever escaped the guillotine of his native land—perhaps with the single exception of Rose Meurtrante, alias Aspasie Molière-Siddons herself."

"Ah!" and Luella ground her teeth; "to think of such a rascal dressing Marguerite's hair with his own hands!"

"What! he was coiffeur for the little one, too?"

"Yes, her preceptress suggested it, and, as a matter of course, the child was delighted with the novelty of the thing."

"I say, my dear!" said Old Grip, gathering up the articles he had selected, after a moment of reflection; "wait here a few minutes for me, if you please."

"Certainly, my love."

"You see," pausing at the door of the adjoining bedroom, "a good deal will probably depend upon the security of the make-up I am contemplating."

"I understand." And when he had disappeared Luella, who had had but few opportunities to revisit their rooms since her taking service as Marguerite's maid, busied herself in setting things to rights in her alert, housewifely

manner. "Take your time, dear," she called after him. "Remember how sharp are the eyes you will most have to fear."

There was a half-audible response.

A few moments later, she suddenly paused in her occupation, glanced suspiciously at the door, and then, without an interruption in the air she was softly humming, she slipped noiselessly into the room where her husband was.

"I am glad you are not yet in your disguise," she whispered. "There is some spy listening at the keyhole of the next room-door."

The detective signed her to keep on singing, while sedulously keeping herself out of sight, and then, noiselessly opening the bedroom door, which also communicated with the outer passage, the merest crack, peered out.

"It's Fraggaponi," he whispered, coming back. "Where are the hammer and nails we had in use here last month?"

Still singing clearly, she signed him to a neighboring closet.

Old Grip was in his shirt-sleeves. Swiftly assuming an enormous pair of false whiskers and false eyebrows, jet-black, which made him look like a pirate in fatigue-dress, he appropriated the desired hammer and a long sharp nail, took one more peep, and then stole out into the passage with the stealthiness of a cat.

Ceasing her song for an instant Luella ventured to peep out after him.

Fraggaponi was in a kneeling posture, with his back toward them. He had ears of enormous size, ordinarily concealed by his long well-oiled hair, and at this moment he had one of them glued to the keyhole of the adjoining door, where he seemed straining his sense of hearing to the utmost tension.

Fortunately, he had the appearance of having but newly arrived there, so that he had probably not yet overheard anything that could seriously compromise the counterplot against Aspasie's schemes.

His huge ear was plastered against the door, fairly covering up the entire lock, and suggesting a pickle-plate or monster oyster-shell in size and shape.

The detective's approach, nail in one hand, hammer in the other, was absolutely without sound.

Then there was the placing of the nail in position, a sharp, dexterous blow of the hammer, a screeching yell from the victim, and the eavesdropper's ear was nailed to the wood as indubitably as a skunk's skin to a barn-door.

Old Grip smilingly retreated, rushing his wife back into the bedroom, and following her.

"Quick!" he advised; "be yourself, my dear, as speedily as you can."

By the time Luella had effected the change, whereby the cockney Sarah Jenkins counterfeit quickly gave way to the resumption of her true character, the frantic yells of Fraggaponi—who had been wholly unable to release himself without tearing the nail through his ear, which he had not the heroism to accomplish—had brought a number of the hotel people upon the scene of his misfortune.

Luella and her husband—the latter still in his piratical semblance—opened the door at the same instant, thus dragging the nailed eavesdropper, squirming and screeching, half-way into the room, just as the first attempts were being made to release him from his predicament on the part of the amazed and laughing new-comers.

"Hallo!" roared Old Grip, in a thunderous voice, as the victim's release was finally effected; "one of those infernal hotel sneak-thieves, eh? And who has been tacking him to my brother-in-law's door?"

"Be careful, Brother Joe!" cried Luella, quick to assist his subterfuge; "the man might do harm in his frenzy. My brother, sir, who has brought me a letter-to-day from my husband in London."

To the hotel proprietor, who smiled and bowed.

It was a white lie, surely pardonable in the fair utterer under the necessities of the case.

"Owl!" yelled Fraggaponi, still dancing a hornpipe of agony, with both hands clasped to his bleeding ear-flap. "This is falsehood! I am a respectable man."

"You're a stranger to us, though, and respectable men are not caught surreptitiously peeking at my guests' key-holes," returned the landlord, sternly. "Fetch a policeman, some of you. And it is well for you, you rascal, that Mr. Grippon himself is not at home to deal with you."

The policeman was speedily forthcoming, and, in spite of his frantic protestations, Fraggaponi was led away to give an account of himself in a police court.

"Could anything have chanced more comically fortunate for us?" exclaimed Luella, laughing afresh a few minutes later when she was resuming her lady's maid make-up.

"Jolly enough, my love," observed her husband, busied once more with his own disguise, "provided the rascal did not overhear too much of our conversation."

"But I am satisfied, Ned, he could have overheard none of it. You know my quickness of

hearing. Well, the man could not have been at the door until after we had separated—not a minute before I gave you the alarm."

"Well and good, then. But we must lose no more time, if it is to be a question of out and in—out for Bloker, Mr. Vanderloopen's butler, and in for myself."

"Truly; and I shall be ready in three minutes more. You must remember to put in an appearance soon after dinner."

"How will I pass muster, my dear?"

Luella clapped her hands approvingly, for, as Old Grip stood before her for inspection, the transformation he had effected in his appearance was complete.

He was no longer dark, but florid, immense mutton-chop whiskers of a fiery red were his facial adornment, a snug, business-like air was his prevailing expression, and his dress was in keeping.

"'Ow will I hanwer, do you fawncys?" he asked.

"Capitally! the typical upper-flunky in search of a comfortable job. Then," dropping once more into her broad Cockney voice and manner, "you'll be one of my hown countrymen, you know—just as Bloker his, for that matter, but la, now! with what an 'owling difference in point of style, you know!"

"Be off, then, my dear!" urged the detective, kissing her. "The afternoon grows late, and I shall have to skurry around in police circles pretty lively to secure the necessary recommendations."

"Just one thing before I go, Ned!" as they were separating.

"Welt, my love?"

"Do you know why Aspasie keeps her hands and arms covered?"

"I do not, and she told the truth in saying that she had kept them so since her girlhood—which was scarcely less vicious than her maturity. But it will be our own fault if we do not find out her secret between us."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NEW BUTLER.

SARAH JENKINS had managed things very cleverly in the servants' domain of Mr. Vanderloopen's house by the time her disguised husband rung the street-bell, and was admitted into the hall by the "Buttons" of the establishment.

There was something of a hubbub back in the direction of the kitchen, and Mr. Vanderloopen, accompanied by his housekeeper, was just coming up from the basement, looking angry and annoyed, while Marguerite, Aspasie and Waldo Dysart had been attracted to the parlor doors by the disturbance.

"Well, sir," said the head of the house, recovering something of his dignity with an effort as he advanced toward the new arrival, "what can I do for you?"

The detective obsequiously made his application for house-service, mentioning the name of Thomas Squiggs as his cognomen, and produced a number of recommendatory letters.

At the same time he felt the black eyes of Aspasie upon him like center-bits, but only flustered up yet more floridly while making a general stiff-kneed obeisance to the parlor doors that would have done credit to the champion flunky in Belgravia or Mayfair.

"Have you ever performed the duties of a butler, my man?" asked Mr. Vanderloopen, taking the proffered letters with some eagerness.

"Yezzur," affably. "I was chief butler at Lord Sweepstakes's Montgomery Terrace in Yorkshire, sir. Then, hafter my lad—poor, dear gentleman!—was killed in the 'Acklebury Steeple-chase (broke his poor neck, sir, and his 'unter's, too, bat the second 'edge jump), I took charge of Lady 'Olcombe's country 'ouse at Chichester, and gave general satisfaction, your Honor, till she eloped to Russia with Captain Granby, of 'er Majesty's Houn. Then in this country, your Honor."

Mr. Vanderloopen, who was scanning the contents of one or two of the letters under the hall lamp, signed him to silence.

"These recommendations seem to be unexceptionable," he said, "and I will run the risk of making personal inquiries later on. It may prove that your application is particularly opportune, Mr.—ah!—Squiggs, I believe you said?"

"Yezzur, at your service, sir; Thomas Squiggs."

"And could you undertake new duties at once?"

"Himmejially, sir," with respectful alacrity.

"My boxes is at the 'otel, sir, and to-morrow I might send for 'em, while to-night—"

"Follow ma, Squiggs," abruptly interrupted the gentleman. "I am dissatisfied with my present butler—have, in fact, already given him his discharge. But wait; do you drink, Squiggs?"

"Hold hale-and-porter with my vittles, sir, halfways, but nothink else. I wouldn't," deprecatingly, "skurly be a Hinglishman, sir, if I didn't like my hold hale and porter, with an occasional 'alf-an'-alf."

"You are, at least, frank about it. Come with me, then."

And Thomas Squiggs followed Mr. Vander-

loopen and his housekeeper in the direction of the basement stairs, amid some titters from the on-lookers at the parlor doors, with an elephantine stateliness that hinted of the most ultra flunkie calves beneath the fall of his pepper-and-salt trowsers.

The hubbub increased as they descended the basement stairs, and Mrs. Blunt—a mild-eyed, motherly woman, past the middle age—without attracting any comment from her master, suddenly clapped her hand to her jaw at the first landing, after which she hurriedly stepped aside to throw herself on her knees and clasp her hands in a devotional attitude, not less unexpected than edifying.

In the broad, well-lighted basement hall between the dining-room and the kitchen a dramatic scene in the every-day drama of "High Life Below Stairs" presented itself.

Bloker, the herculean butler, occupied the middle ground, fighting drunk, a bottle flourished in one hand, a napkin in the other, and the neck of yet another bottle sticking out of the tail-pocket of his regulation dress-coat, while the bow of his white necktie was cocked up high under his left ear, and his eyes were blazing with a rebellious gleam.

Sarah Jenkins was in tears, partly supported by a sympathetic chambermaid. The cook, an enormous, double-chinned Irishwoman, of a sort of Brobdingnagian comeliness, with the girth of a Percheron truck-horse, was filling the kitchen doorway, her hands under her apron, severity in her face. A little scullery maid peeped in upon the scene as well as she could from behind. While, humorously surveying the tableau from a negligent position to one side, there was a slim, well-built young fellow, of more than good looks and piercing black eyes, whom the detective had no difficulty in identifying with the sentimental coachman, John Meadows, of his wife's diary.

"Urrah! 'ip, 'ip, 'urrah!" roared the drunken butler, flourishing his bottle in Mr. Vanderloopen's face. "What, sir! you'd discharge me—me, Jack Bloker, as was once in 'er Majesty's 'Orse Guards? Not if I know it!"

Here the lady's-maid redoubled her tears.

"Ee—'ee tried to—to kiss me again, sir, directly you were gone!" she sobbed. "I can't put up with it, Mr. Vanderloopen! I'm a honest woman, if I ham but a sarvent."

"Of course I did!" shouted Bloker. "What are 'andsome young women made for if not to kiss? That for you, sir!" tossing the napkin on top of his head, and snapping his fingers under the proprietor's nose. "'Oop'er hup! 'oop'er hup!"

And he set up a sort of bacchanalian can-can, which, from his great natural weight and particular "logyness" on this occasion, caused the house to tremble.

Mr. Vanderloopen was pale with indignation, while the new applicant for the butler's situation bore a highly shocked expression all over his florid face.

"This is simply outrageous, your Honor!" he ventured to interpose, in a hoarse aside. For the time being, the slaughter of the aspirate was all but omnipresent, as may well be imagined. "Shall I go for the perlice, sir, or would you sooner 'ave me chuck 'im hout?"

"I'd have tried to bounce him before this," softly observed the young coachman, "for all that he's strong as a bull, but the master would not permit."

"No, no!" replied Mr. Vanderloopen, nervously, for he was very kind-hearted. "No violence. Bloker has been with me a long time, and it is only latterly he has taken to the bottle so sadly. I would sooner he should go peacefully, if he only will. There now, that will do, Bloker."

Bloker had paused long enough in his drunken can-can to make a last endearing grab at Jenkins, who was evading him with fresh screeches and protestations as to her being honest, if the 'eyings fell.

"Och, the b'aste!" cried fat Norah, indignantly; "the Sassenach b'aste! And to t'ink that he once" regrettfully, in spite of herself, "made so bowld as to talk sw'ate to mesel'!"

"That for you, hold Dollars-and-Cents!" roared the inebriate, snapping his fingers at Mr. Vanderloopen again, and recommencing his war-dance. "Gaugh! what are you? A parwenoo—a bloated Hamerican parwenoo! What are you to a man as has worked for jukes and hearls, and scoured the plate for hemperors? 'Oop! set 'em hup again! 'Ip, 'ip, 'urrah! What's the bloody use as long as you're 'appy?"

And the prancings went on at a greater rate than ever, with occasional pauses for a swig at the brandished black bottle.

The florid Thomas Squiggs had by this time shed his coat, and was turning back his shirt-cuffs suggestively. But Mr. Vanderloopen thrust him back.

"Not yet," he said. "I shall give him one more chance. Here, Bloker, my man!" sternly approaching the spring-heeled inebriate, and grasping his shoulder; "I've had too much of this—you can no longer make a bear-garden of my house. You're discharged; and out you must go forthwith!"

"Discharged, eh?" cried Bloker, partly sobered for the moment.

"Yes; come back in the morning for your luggage, and you shall have your month's pay in the bargain. But out you must go now; for I have a worthy man to fill your place."

A defiant whoop was the response.

"What!" roared the Colossus; "is it that red-eaded starveling, pointing to the complacent Squiggs, "as is to 'unt and 'ound me hout of my situation?"

"That is the man who is to take your place, Bloker, certainly. Do depart peaceably now, like a good fellow, without compelling me to send—"

A blow from the giant's elbow sent him reeling, and then, hurling the bottle full at the applicant's head, Bloker, both fists in the air, charged upon the latter with the bellow of an infuriated bull.

But the missile did but splinter itself against the wall, so cleverly was it dodged; after which crash, crash, crash! flew out the disguised detective's trained blows—right and left, one, two, three, ding-dong! a triumph of middle-weight pugilistic prowess—from the shoulder; and the disturbance was virtually at an end.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIGH LIFE BELOW STAIRS.

"I ALWAYS liked them blonde and flurrid min," commented Norah, the fat cook, who was something of a brunette in her huge way. "Me cousin, Moike, was a red-head, an' devil the mon in County Clare as could best him wid hand, fut or black-thorn sticket! Och, but Moike was a broth av a boy, an' I t'ink we'll loike the new butler, Sassenach though he be, by the way he kivers the flure wid his lether haitches."

It was a good hour after the successful landing of the obstreperous Bloker into a policeman's paternal embrace on the sidewalk, at the hands of the pseudo Thomas Squiggs, and she was still holding forth over the event to her admirers, Gretchen, the chambermaid, and little Mary Ann, the scullery girl, pending the cleaning-up in the kitchen for the night.

"Oh, but ain't he just the dandy!" exclaimed Mary Ann, wide-eyed over the dish-pan she was scouring. "And he so much smaller and slenderer than Mr. Bloker, too."

"Thim's the sort, my dear," continued the cook, complacently. "My Cousin Moike was no bigger than the new butler, an' w'u'dn't weigh a stone heavier than Bobby Beans, the buttons, beyant, an' yet he danced around Towerin' Ted, the Tipperary Giant, like a cooper around a cask."

"I don't like for mens to be vighting," said Gretchen, who was of a tender disposition. "I'd radder see dem trinkin' peer und smoking deir bipes togeder, like Gristians."

"Ow!" sneered the Amazonian cook. "But thin the Dutch have no hearts in 'em for r'ale amusement."

"That's the talk, cooky!" cried Bobby Beans, squaring off at an imaginary antagonist. "By cracky! but didn't Bloker go down before Mr. Squiggs's science? If I had known him for the chump he's proved himself, wouldn't I have got even before this for the wallopin' he's treated me to in times past."

"There, there, Bobby Buttons!" and Norah patronizingly patted him on his bullet head; "you'll have to change your fat into muscle before you'll ever be good for much in a scrapping match, even if your heart is in the right place, which I doubt. Ah, Miss Jenkins!" to the lady's maid, who at this moment hurriedly entered the kitchen, pitcher in hand; "don't you agree with me that the new butler, Mistrer Squiggs, is a foine and gallant mon?"

"I suppose so, Norah," replied the new-comer, busting up to the range. "But my young lady is still that haggard hair down 'ere in the basemint that she may 'ave another faint. Is this hall the 'ot water you 'ave, Miss Norah? And w'atever is become of Mrs. Blunt, the 'ousekeeper? Ma'm'zelle Haspagie wants to see 'er about the keys to 'er dressing-case."

"You'll be findin' wather a plenty, an' as hot as Tophet in the copper b'iler, Miss Jenkins; and here is Mistress Blunt to sp'ake for herself."

"Is it the keys for her dressing-case mamzelle is wanting, Jenkins?" asked a sadly-resigned voice, and its possessor, Mrs. Blunt, who had dreamily entered directly on the lady's-maid's heels, passed over to a cupboard in a remote corner. "I think they are here, and I would have got them for her before this, only the drawers had never been locked before, and I couldn't suppose she would want to use them."

"But, ma'm," continued the cook, loth to relinquish her favorite subject, "you should think highly of Mr. Squiggs, if any one in this wide, wide wurld ought."

"I?" exclaimed Jenkins, with her champion Cockney stare.

"In coarse, ma'm." And Norah watched her narrowly; while Gretchen, little Mary Ann and Buttons looked on, profoundly interested in this discussion between the great ladies of the below-stairs society.

"But 'ow's that, Miss Norah?"

"Because it was your good looks, ma'm, that ruined Jack Bloker wid his admiration for you, an' put the devil an' the craythur into him at one an' the same toime, ma'm."

"That for his admiration!" exclaimed Jenkins, with a pert toss of her pretty head. "Ee's a himpident and 'orrif blackguard, Miss Norah, and I'm just 'appy he was chuck'd hout as 'e was, you know; and I don't think much of them, ma'm, as can 'ave any sympathy for the 'owling and howdacious brute, you know."

"Oh, that's but nathural, ma'm, an' who is to blame you for despisin' of the imperient omad-hoon, ma'm? But you must jest as nathurally t'ink a heap of the good-looking Mr. Squiggs, as fired him so nately."

"Well, I don't know about that, ma'm," returned Jenkins, indifferently, as she filled her pitcher at last, and being perfectly well aware that swarthy Norah was bent on filling the erstwhile Bloker's place in her capacious bosom with the florid new arrival. "Perhaps it's because I'm fair myself, ma'm, but I never could get up hany 'eartfelt haggitation hover them liver-aired and pink-and-white complected gentlemen, Miss Norah; the holly-skinned and dreamy-eyed bein' per'aps more in my line. But w'atever can 'ave become of the 'ousekeeper, you know?"

"W'u'dn't the loikes av your cleverness know widout askin', Mistress Jenkins?" And the mountainous cook, considerably relieved as to future amatory prospects, pointed with supreme scorn toward a little niche alongside the remote cupboard.

There the good housekeeper was on her knees, with one hand meekly, trustingly raised in an attitude of earnest but silent prayer, the other pressed upon her raging tooth.

Luella dared not tarry longer, and silencing the cook's contemptuous snicker with an imperative gesture, she lightly crossed the floor, and laid her hand upon the supplicant's shoulder.

"Do forgive me for interrupting you, dear Mrs. Blunt!" she said, in her sweet, womanly way. "But I really must have the keys to leave in Mademoiselle Aspasie's room for her."

"One moment, my child! There!" The housekeeper arose, dropping her hand from her face with a beautiful expression of trustfulness. "It is gone—the pain, the jumping pain!" triumphantly. "And here are the keys to the dressing-case. Oh, my dear Sarah! if you could only believe in the efficacy, the miraculousness of it, how happy you would make me, and how at peace you would be in your own heart and mind!"

Luella kissed her on the forehead.

"Perhaps I would, dear; I must think it over. But I must really be hurrying up-stairs again."

And followed more slowly by Mrs. Blunt herself, she quitted the room, oblivious of the fact (though it would not have greatly surprised her) that the good woman, on experiencing a fresh pang from the jumping tooth, was again on her knees to pray it away at the foot of the basement stair before Luella had well turned the angle in the hall above.

The latter had left Marguerite reclining on her lounge with a nervous headache, and was now somewhat surprised, upon reaching the second floor, to detect young John Meadows, the sentimental coachman, coming out of the passage, as though he might have been haunting the outside of the young lady's door—she wouldn't credit her with the impropriety of admitting him even into her little sitting-room.

"What are you doing 'ere?" she sharply demanded, almost forgetting her Cockneyism in her indignation.

The young man smiled at her with a lazy sort of impudence.

"Only looking for a few haitches that you might 'ave dropped in the passage, ma'm, you know," he replied, imitating her studied accent with a laugh. "By the way, Jenkins, you are too deuced pretty to slaughter the President's English in the way you do."

She did not deign to answer him as he lounged off in the direction of the back-stairs, and it was a relief to her upon entering the room to feel assured, by the young girl's speech and manner, that no interview with the coachman had been granted.

It was about this time that Mr. Vanderloopen, after a visit to the butlery, entered the drawing-room, where Mlle. Aspasie and Waldo Dysart were engaged ostensibly in a game of bezique.

"This Squiggs is doing nicely!" he observed, rubbing his hands in high good-humor. "I shouldn't wonder if I've got a real treasure of a steward in the fellow. The pantries are already in such order as they have not been, under Bloker's management, in a twelvemonth, and he was rubbing up the plate till it fairly blazed. I only hope his recommendations will stand the test of a personal investigation."

The recommendations proved all right; their presenter was too old and clever a hand to have anything wanting there. And thus Old Grip, no less than Luella, his faithful wife and co-worker, became a fixture in the retired merchant's rather extraordinary household.

CHAPTER XIX.
COMPLICATIONS.

FOUR weeks had passed since Old Grip's assumption of the butler's duties in Mr. Vanderloopen's house, without as yet any necessity arising for the detective to declare his identity to either the widower or his step-daughter, together with his object in carrying out the system of espionage and protection, as it might be called, which had been instituted.

And yet Aspasie's plot to become possessed of the rich man's money had been steadily progressing, though she had been prudently content to advance it slowly and by scarcely perceptible degrees.

But by this time it became sufficiently obvious to both Old Grip and Luella, who had of course familiarized themselves with the slow, steady evolution of the adventuress's designs from day to day, that the crisis was approaching—in other words, that Aspasie was preparing the several surprises out of which she intended to make her *grand coup*, as the Frenchmen would say.

In the first place, Mr. Vanderloopen was by this time irremediably, head over ears, in love, or in the toils of the woman's fascinations, whichever may best describe the emotional enslavement of a man of his years and experience. Public opinion, his whilom regard for the conventionalities, the recentness of Althea Vanderloopen's death and his love for her, all might at a mere word from Aspasie be flung to the winds. He was become her merest slave, and it was even pathetic to observe his accesses of senile and scarcely controllable jealousy, especially of Waldo—for she cunningly kept them both in leading-strings as yet—whenever her extraordinary beauty attracted the worship of other men, which it was pretty sure to do on all occasions.

Then Waldo Dysart was still deluded by the belief that it was he whom she secretly loved and would eventually marry; though, in view of his pennilessness, or dependence on his uncle's bounty, together with his engagement to Marguerite and what was at stake with him in that regard, it was more than odd that his eyes were not oftener opened to the true drift of Aspasie's designs. But he continued to seek consolation from her in his numerous pecuniary troubles, which were numerous and increasing, while she wheedled and played with him, cat-and-mouse fashion, until ready to consign him to obscurity and disgrace.

Then Marguerite had been cunningly molded with a view to her ultimate elimination, likewise, out of the widower's favor and out of the high society atmosphere in which she might otherwise have moved an ornament and a star. Aspasie, rapacious as a vulture, selfish as sin itself, would brook no rival luminary, and the time was rapidly approaching when the *ingenue* would, if her preceptress's plans went not awry, be brushed away into the yawning darkness and snuffed out as ruthlessly as if she were no more than a penny dip.

"Has the girl met her coachman lover since the interview that you managed to interrupt day before yesterday?"

The detective asked the question of his wife one day in one of the secret conferences which they frequently held together over the situation.

"No; but she is evidently longing for another," replied Luella. "I can see it in her growing restlessness, and you know what reckless notions Aspasie has already succeeded so cunningly in instilling into the girl's mind, which was formerly so pure and circumspect."

"I know; but the next interview must be also interrupted; or, still better, prevented."

"Of course, my dear, if in my power. But—" Luella came to a trouble pause.

"Well?"
"I rather fear that in the end we shall have to let Marguerite go."

"Never!"

"But we have undertaken, I fear, more than we bargained for. The girl is evidently dead in love, and the coachman himself is not a bad or unworthy fellow, in his way."

"Yes, in the coachman way. Not to be thought of!"

"Were we in a better position to interfere; but as it is, as mere servants in the household—"

"No matter; we must interfere," sternly. "Do you forget my covenant with the girl's mother?"

"By no means, Ned. But if love can laugh at locksmiths, can it not also laugh at the interference of a sham house-steward and lady's maid?"

"No; not when a breath from either of us can expose to Mr. Vanderloopen and the world at large the appalling infamy of the prime mover in these devilish plottings."

"Is not Mr. Vanderloopen too far gone to have his eyes opened?"

"No: the man is glamoured, but not yet lost."

"Still, your covenant with the dead has not even enabled you to get on the track of the missing diamonds as yet."

"All in good time, my love."

"But Mr. Vanderloopen is returning to the subject again of late, I hear."

"That is true. He would like to have them back,

as an offering to the very woman who committed an assassination to obtain secret possession of the gems. Only yesterday he was wondering what had become of Old Grip, and talking of employing a fresh detective."

"Well, what is to be done?"

"Just this. If Marguerite is bent on eloping with Meadows, we must time her endeavor with the stroke that I am satisfied Aspasie is about to let fall on Dysart. In rescuing both victims together, we shall seize the opportunity of unmasking Aspasie. They will both be ready to second us, as you may well believe."

"But Vanderloopen may marry Aspasie at almost any hour."

"The fault be on his own fool-head, if he does! I shall at least have saved Marguerite. Then do you forget old Nadka Hertzikoff, and the charge of murder that I hold suspended over the adventuress's head? If she pushes me to the wall, I shall let the sword fall, even to the surrender of the secret which Marguerite's poor mother was so anxious to have me preserve from her husband's knowledge to the last. But I hope to accomplish the siren's ruin without resorting to this."

"Of course, between her and Jules Meurtrante, or Fraggapponi, her brother, the gems are safely concealed somewhere; and her object is to discover their hiding-place (misled and forgotten by Althea, you know), somewhere here in the house after she shall have gilled the widower on her matrimonial hook. I must block that game by getting possession of the diamonds beforehand, if possible; and, with old Nadka's help, I hope to succeed."

"How about Waldo?"

"I suppose we shall have to let him slide. He isn't worth Marguerite, any way. But, above all, we must take extra precautions against the nature of these conferences of ours being even so much as suspected. That would ruin all."

"I understand that. The chief fear I have is of Mrs. Blunt. The good woman is forever tagging at my heels in her zeal to convert me to her Faith Cure craze. She annoys me almost as much as big Norah does you with her amatory importunities."

"The devil fly away with that woman!" growled the *pseudo* butler; "though it would doubtless be a heavy contract for even such as he. It's a case of the mountain coming to Mahomet with a vengeance. She engulfed me in her mammoth embrace, in spite of myself, and I give you my word I was all but smothered, kick and swear as I would. I was like a field-mouse in a bale of hay."

The pretended lady's-maid burst into a laugh.

"You can now imagine something of what I underwent from Bloker," she said. "However, the crisis is approaching, I suppose."

"Yes; do you continue to look after Marguerite, while I keep my watch over Waldo; for, as I said, his elimination will be a signal for hers. But, hush!"

This conversation took place not long after breakfast at the head of the back stairs on the second floor, and now Fraggapponi, doubtless from having just called to dress Aspasie's hair, was observed coming thoughtfully along the passage.

At a look from the detective Luella darted down the steps, intending to reach Marguerite's rooms by the main staircase from below, while the former advanced to meet the hairdresser.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fraggapponi," was his rather obsequious greeting. "And 'ow are you feeling to-day, sir?"

Fraggapponi started out of his walking reverie and then looked at the pretended butler with unusual eagerness.

CHAPTER XX.

ASPASIE'S PLOT.

"Hi, Mr. Squiggs! but I'm glad to see you," returned Fraggapponi, in his imperfect English. "There's something on my mind I've determined to speak to you about."

The butler stroked his flaring red mutton-chop whiskers, and looked becomingly expectant. The hair-dresser and he had frequently exchanged the time of day in the passages, and were on fairly good artificial terms.

"W'at can I do for you, signor?" he asked, blandly.

The hair-dresser laid a hand confidentially on the butler's arm.

"See here, Squiggs; you seem to be on pleasant terms with Miss Marguerite's beautiful maid, I've casually remarked, and are, moreover, her fellow-countryman, to judge by your accents?"

"Hundoubtedly, Mr. Fraggapponi."

"And you might even give a likely guess as to how she would feel toward a fellow who silently adores her—is madly, though as yet undemonstratively, in love with her, in fact."

Squiggs mastered a start of surprise, though his first impulse was to knock the fellow down. It was easy to see what was coming, and he had not suspected it, though Luella had once mentioned the circumstance of Fraggapponi casting sheep's-eyes at her in passing.

"Aw! per'aps I might, Mr. Fraggapponi," he

drawled, "though women is queer and secret in haffairs of the eart, you know."

"Oh, but you could make a likely guess, Mr. Squiggs."

"Well, w'at hof it, Mr. Fraggapponi?"

"It's just this, *companero*," in a lively, business-like way. "I'm the man that loves her to distraction, and I'd let the ground slide under my feet for the chance to lead her to the altar as my blooming bride."

"To the haltar, eh?"

"He, he, he! Not to the halter, I hope, my friend, but to the altar—make her my wife, you know."

"Ho, yes! But why don't you tell her so, then?"

"That's just it; cheeky as I naturally am, Squiggs, I somehow haven't the pluck to. Whenever I come face to face with those blue eyes and that golden hair of hers, the thought of which sets me crazy, I can no more speak or hint of my sentiments than if I were as born dumb as a fine-tooth comb."

"Ha! that's the way of it, I've 'eard, when a feller's 'ead over hears in love."

"Yes, yes; but what I want you to do is to stand by me, Mr. Squiggs."

"Ho, come now, signor. I couldn't hask 'er 'ow she felt in her eart toward a houtsider, you know."

"No, certainly not, my dear fellow. But you might sound her as how she is impressed by the passionateness of my regards, for she must have noticed 'em. And you might also throw in a hint or two about my rich, dark, manly beauty, and my having a paying business. Eh?"

"Y-e-es."

"Or do just this. Tell her I'm ambitious to dress that golden hair of hers in scientific style, *Diablo!* I could find an off-hour for the operation if she could only do the same, and I somehow feel that I'd pluck up the courage to declare myself while binding up that glorious hair of hers. And, oh, Lord! but wouldn't I build it? Even Mademoiselle Aspasie's wouldn't be a circumstance to the way I'd do up that hair of Miss Jenkins's!"

"Well, I'll try to mention the subject sooner or later, Mr. Fraggapponi."

"Excellenza! there's a good fellow."

"But I wouldn't 'ope for too much, you know, signor?"

"Why not?"

"Well, she's an uncompromising Protestant, and you are doubtless a Roman Catholic."

"He, he, he! Yes, to be sure; but, bless your simplicity, Mr. Squiggs, I'll be anything to please her—a Methodist parson, or a dancing Dervish, for that matter."

"Ho, hindeed?"

"Yes, yes; you see, my religion doesn't sit very heavy on my conscience, Mr. Squiggs."

"Hindeed!" with a sarcasm that was altogether wasted. "I'm glad you've told me so, Fraggapponi, for I was 'alf-afraid you was in tending to be a priest and take 'oly horders, you know."

"By no means; never dreamed of such a thing. May I count on you as my friend in this delicate matter, then?"

He extended his hand, which the detective reluctantly grasped, and then Fraggapponi went on his way, apparently rejoicing.

"The devil!" thought the pretended Squiggs; "but our complications are growing. Luella will doubtless find this fellow worse than Bloker."

On his way to the dining-room, through the main hall below, he met Mr. Vanderloopen going out, and then, in passing the back parlor door, which was partly ajar, he overheard two voices, in low, earnest conversation within, which he recognized as Aspasie's and Waldo Dysart's.

He did not attempt to resist the temptation to slip into the library, which was the next room adjoining, and separated from the back parlor by merely a heavy *portière*, that he might overhear more audibly.

It was well that he did so, for Aspasie's secret treacherous intentions with regard to Waldo's future were evidently at the culminating point.

"But I must have the money, my darling!" Dysart's voice was heard saying. "These are debts of honor, you know, and if they are not liquidated I shall be hopelessly disgraced."

"I know, my love, but what are you to do?" Aspasie's voice responded, caressingly. "I have literally no more money to lend you. I don't make it as I used to when reading in public, you must remember."

"But, great heavens! what am I to do? I daren't forge my uncle's name to another draft."

"No?"

"Why, no; I suppose not. The good luck at cards, that enabled me to cash and destroy the first spurious check, might desert me in a second attempt."

"That is true. But your indiscretion was only for a small amount, I believe?"

"Comparatively so; only for a thousand."

"It is well for you not to have nerve to risk it again, my dear Waldo. Forgery is a grave error, which, you will remember, I have always advised you against."

"Yes, yes, but nerve! Don't accuse me of a lack of nerve, Aspasie. I must and will have the five thousand somehow!"

"You daren't ask your uncle outright for the amount?"

"After solemnly swearing to him that I would never gamble again, and that less than six months ago? Impossible!"

Aspasie was overheard to sigh wearily, and then there was the sound of a kiss being exchanged.

"You love me, Aspasie? You are true to me, in spite of all?"

"Ciel! can you doubt it, *cheri*?"

"And your seeming encouragement to that superannuated old ass, my uncle, is only for policy's sake?"

"For what else, my love?"

"Aspasie!" abruptly, and evidently a moment of desperate reflection.

"Well, my dear?"

"If I were rich, would you run off to Europe with me?"

"Ah, if you were rich! And then there is the petite Marguerite."

"To the deuce with Marguerite! Even if she loved me, which she certainly doesn't, could I endure the colorless affection of such a child after knowing, or anticipating, such a love as yours? Answer my question, Aspasie."

"Yes, then—if you were rich enough, *mon ami*."

"Would a cool hundred thousand do us?"

"Oh, that is a great deal of money, my dear!"

"Would you go off with me if I had that much?"

Another sigh, followed by the sound of yet another kiss, together with some inaudible words, after which the young man was heard to start to his feet.

"It is then agreed," he was heard to say. "You wi' meet me secretly Saturday morning at the pier of the Transatlantique Company."

"Yes."

"Good! and I shall have the equivalent of a hundred thousand dollars on my person. The die is cast!"

"But you must confide in me precisely how you are going to effect this, my own! There must be no secrets between us from this time forth."

"It is simple enough—and desperate enough, too. I know of a number of men who will readily cash my uncle's note at hand to the extent, say, of twenty thousand dollars. I shall have five of these prepared, and cashed by as many different parties having no knowledge of each other's transactions with me—at least, until considerably later on—on the day before our elopement, which will be day after to-morrow—Friday. On that same day, I shall find means to induce my uncle to visit his country estate at Rlinebeck, to remain till Saturday night. In the mean time, the knowledge of the forgeries can scarcely come to his ears, and we—you and I, my love, my life, my darling!—will be afar on the blue waters, with love and wealth at our command."

Another kiss, and doubtless an embrace as well.

Then Aspasie's melting voice again:

"Still, my angel, you will never forget that I warned you against obtaining money in this—this irregular way?"

"I shall only remember that you love me! We can be married on the steamer. Good-by, my darling! Oh, if Saturday were but here!"

Following upon their parting kiss and the sound of the young man's retreating steps there was heard, rippling and gurgling like a bird's twitter, the low, mocking laugh of the sorceress who was leading him to his ruin.

"The end of this plot is getting red-hot," thought the detective, as he stole out of the library. "I wonder how Luella finds it is going with Marguerite."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OTHER END OF THE PLOT.

THIS was a Thursday morning. In the meantime Luella had entered Marguerite's rooms rather abruptly, just in time to see the young girl slip out of sight a note that she had been reading, and pretend to be deeply immersed in a story paper in her lap.

"That scrawl is from John Meadows," thought the pseudo lady's-maid, while affecting to pay no heed, "and I must master its purport, if possible."

"Bless me, miss! 'ow tangled and touseled your beautiful 'air is," she exclaimed aloud, while setting the room to rights. "You should 'ave let me do it up for you afore breakfast, as I wanted you to."

Marguerite was in the far-away, pensivemood that is so frequently significant of more than a passing whim or reverie with young women of her age and temperament.

"I know I should, Jenkins," she replied, listlessly seating herself before the dressing-case mirror. "But it is never too late for hair-dressing and love-making, I suppose."

Jenkins affected to be consumedly amused.

"Oh, no, miss! per'aps not," she replied, busying herself at once with the pretty but tangled

brown hair and laughing broadly. "I suppose not, ma'm. But what can a hingenuous young thing like you, miss, know about love-making, now?"

Brightening up a little, Marguerite answered in the same spirit of badinage; and it was observable that much of the modest sensitiveness of a few weeks previous had disappeared, giving place to a bolder, harder and more reckless tone and manner. So much had the insidious poison of Aspasie's contact already effected in Marguerite's impressible nature, which had been as wax in her molding touch.

"Here is such a lovely serial story that I'm interested in, Jenkins," continued Marguerite, relapsing into her pensive mood after a few rallying exchanges. "There is one chapter so sweet that I'll read it over again, and out aloud to you, while you are brushing my hair, if you wish."

"Won't I, though? Oh, 'ow kind of you, Miss Marguerite! and me honly an 'umble maid to you, too."

"That is nothing, Jenkins," sententiously. "The humble in life are equally susceptible to the tender emotions with the refined and high-placed—sometimes even more so, I think," with a growing blush that was not lost upon the servant maid.

"Ho, hindeed! but do you really think so, miss?"

"Indeed, I do! They naturally long for affection and emotion more than those who have more opportunities for diverting their thoughts and emotions into varying channels, and are probably capable of deeper, stronger and more constant love."

"My, miss! 'ow you can hargue and talk. It's just like a story-book. But is the chapter you speak of so hainteresting, then?"

"Ouch! not quite so hard, Jenkins. Interesting? Well, I should smile, Jenkins! It's of love—love between a high-born young lady and her—her footman, who will afterward turn out to be a lordly neighbor's son, who has heroically adopted this plan to determine whether she will love him merely for his prospective coronet or for himself alone. I can see that romantic *dénouement* sticking right out already—written between the lines, as it were. You'd call that *rather* interesting, would you not, Jenkins?"

"Oh, Lud, mum, yes! What, miss! and can you perdict all that as the denoomong afore it is heven printed?"

"Oh, yes! that is easy enough for one who is used to novel-reading. But I'll read the chapter aloud—that is, if you will stop pulling and jerking so."

"I'll do my best, miss, hindeed I will. But my 'eart is in my mouth, you see, miss, with hexpectation."

Marguerite then began to read the vaunted chapter, which proved to be about as emotional and overstrained as the appreciative reader or auditor could well desire.

"Oh, isn't that just too 'eavenly!" cried Jenkins, putting the finishing touches on the *coiffure* as the reading was finished, with a little sigh on the part of the reader. "'Ow sweet Lady Gwenderline gave in to 'im, and what a lobster for love-making that Tummas was! It makes one feel hall hoverish!"

Marguerite, however, had fallen into a dreamy little reverie.

"Jenkins?" she said, at last, with a timid hesitancy of manner.

"Yes, miss."

"Don't you think a—a coachman is just as high placed as—as a footman?"

"Lud, miss, I suppose so! But may I hask you why you hinquirre, miss?"

"I—I may tell you before long, Jenkins," hurriedly deserting the chair to slip into the adjoining room. "It may be that I shall have a great piece of confidence to repose in you."

"Count on me, miss!" with a sort of gasp, for the hastily-concealed note of half an hour previous had slipped from the pocket of Marguerite's loose morning-gown and was left lying on the chair. "I'll," calling after her, "consider it the 'ighest honor, miss."

And here she hastily snatched up the missive, and, in spite of the semi-illegibleness of the scrawl it contained, mastered its purport with her practiced eye almost at a glance.

"MY OWN TRUE MARGEREET:—i have arranged for our lopement to-morrow nite (Fridy) at eleven o'clock your uncle will then be away from home for I hurd him say he was going to Rinebeck to-morr mornin to remain till Saturdy Be bak of the stables at 11 sharp a strange carriage and pare will be in waitng to take us to Hoboken where a preacher will be in rediness to make us 1 After that we can go to my sisters in Passeyic and wate till the storm blows over bring what mony and juells you can of corse i wont be able to talk with you to-day sunse the french woman will probably go driving with you as usual but try and ride with me to-morrer in the park alone wen we can range things more fully. Excuse writin and spelling for education isn't love and i am yours till deth, JOHN."

Such was the precious scrawl that Marguerite returned a moment later, in great excitement, to snatch up hurriedly from the chair, while Jenkins went on serenely with her work in another corner of the boudoir, without the faintest intimation that she was aware of its exist-

ence, though her heart was filled with supreme pity for the girl who could receive such a missive without being disgustedly disenchanted with its writer from that time forth.

But then Luella subsequently reflected that the romantic (and doubtless equally mercenary) coachman was probably much more of an adept at telling than writing the tale of his love, which might go a good way in making up for his villainous illiteracy.

At this juncture Mlle. Aspasie (fresh from the treacherous conference with Dysart, which Old Grip had so opportunely overheard) came into the room as Luella was on the point of leaving it.

"Don't go just yet, Jenkins," said the adventuress, kissing her pupil and murmurously commenting on her good looks. "Or rather, wait for me in my room, as there is something I want to say to you, my friend."

"Yes, mum." But before Luella quitted the room she overheard Aspasie say to Marguerite in a low voice: "I see how it is, *petite*; you would dearly like to be in the Park alone with him this afternoon. Don't pout, then, and you shall have your wish."

Aspasie's apartment was quite at the further extremity of the second floor passage, at the turn of the corridor leading to the back or servants' stair, and, as Luella was about entering it, her husband looked out from this corridor and cautiously beckoned.

"We must confer again without delay," he called, in a hoarse whisper. "The plot is culminating with regard to Waldo, requiring instant counterplotting on our part."

"So it is with regard to Marguerite," replied Luella, "but I cannot speak with you now. Be on the first floor back stairs landing within ten minutes. Don't be seen here now; Aspasie may be here at any instant."

Nodding, he slipped away, and, almost directly after entering the apartment, Luella was followed by Aspasie.

"Ma chere Sarah," said the adventuress, smiling most amiably as she carefully closed the door, "we have been pretty good friends, you and I, in this house, no?"

"Ho, very good, mum!" and Sarah seemed to beam all over with satisfaction. "Extremely good, mum!"

"And I have treated you pretty nicely, my friend, have I not?"

"La, mum! Could there be a more elegant and nicer lady to a poor, 'umble girl like me? Never in hall my borned days, not heven when I was in the Countess of Dressington's 'ouse'old at 'Ighgate—"

"Never mind that, my dear. Here is a little present for you."

"Hoh, mum!" with a twenty-dollar bill, that had been tendered her, still held bewilderedly between the fingers of her outstretched hand; "you halmost take my breath away. But what ham I hexpected to do for this, mum?"

"Merely to see that Mr. Vanderloopen and I are not interrupted by any one in an interview that I anticipate having with him some time after luncheon. After that I may have some further instructions for you."

"Hoh, ma'm! I won't ave pay for obleegin' of you in such a trifle. Trust in me." And, thrusting back the money in Aspasie's hand, the incorruptible Jenkins hustled out of the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

UPON this escaping from Aspasie's presence, Luella would have hurried away to keep her appointment with her husband on the back-stairs landing, but that, upon glancing along the main passage, she saw Marguerite rather excitedly signaling her from the door of her own sitting-room.

There was nothing for it but to obey, and, more than suspecting that the threatened confidence was now to be reposed in her, Luella, with a reluctance that she could with difficulty conceal, obeyed the signal.

Marguerite impulsively drew her into the room, locked the door behind them, and then burst into tears.

"W'atever is up with you, miss?" exclaimed the maid-in-waiting. "Is it ill, or honly hindisposed, you har', ma'm?"

"Oh, worse than that, Jenkins!" sobbed the young girl, throwing her arms about the other's neck. "Come, sit down here with me." Still sobbing, she drew her to the lounge, where they both sat down, Jenkins returning the caress of the pretty little arms right cordially, for she knew what was coming, and pitied the girl's weakness from the bottom of her kind heart. "You know I was going to relieve my mind by telling you a secret, Jenkins?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Well, I must do so now. Somehow I feel that you can sympathize with me. You will let me, won't you, Sarah?"

"Of course, I will, my dear young lady, if it will stop you from haggravating yourself. What is the matter?"

"I—I am going to—to elope with John!"

And Marguerite's face, which had suddenly crimsoned, was buried in her companion's bosom.

"Elope with John!" echoed Jenkins, with an indignant mournfulness she could not account for, in view of its being no news to her.

"Yes," still hiding her face, "with John Meadows."

"Oh, the coachman—your uncle's coachman?"

The words were pronounced so contemptuously that Marguerite suddenly looked up with another flush than that of shame or confusion—a flush of anger.

"What of that?" she cried. "Can he help that? And isn't a coachman a man, just as much as a merchant is, or a banker, or—or a king?"

"Hoh, yes, miss!" imperturbably; "a man of coaches, for instance. There's where he gets the name, coach-man, you know."

"You shall not speak slightly of the man I love, Jenkins!—you who are no more than a domestic servant yourself. I will not have it! I hate you!"

"Ho, hindeed, miss! and what did you send for me?"

"For—for your advice," falteringly again.

"W'ich you was fully determined not to follow after you 'ad got, unless it 'appened to him with your own houtlandish hideas, Miss Marguerite!"

"No, no!" and Marguerite once more dissolved in tears; "indeed, no, Sarah! Oh, I am so uncertain and unhappy!"

"That will do, dear!" and Jenkins kissed her affectionately. "I wasn't hangry, if you were. Tell me, have you told ma'mzelle of this?"

"Not outright, though she suspects it, without a doubt. But never mind her. Somehow I can't exactly feel any great trust in Aspasie."

"Why can't you?"

"You won't repeat what I say?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, I don't know exactly. I love her, I suppose, and she is really the most beautiful being I ever saw, and all that. But somehow I get the feeling that she isn't very sincere."

"Hindeed!"

"Yes; you see, she advises me against John in her conventional way, and then talks to me about the glory of true love wherever and however it may exist, and between persons of no matter what differences of station. It's just as if she were advising me both ways at once."

"I understand, my dear. Don't say anything more about ma'mzelle. You are hanxious to confide in me, because you do trust in me?"

"Yes, yes!" eagerly; "that is it."

"And you daren't confide in your good step-father?"

"Oh, no, no! not for the world. He would horsewhip John, or kill him, or maybe send him to the horrid State Prison!"

"And you want my hadvice?"

"Yes, yes."

"Now when is this elopement to be?"

Marguerite again hid her face.

"I can't tell you that," she murmured. "It wouldn't be fair to John, who is the very soul of chivalry, Sarah."

"Oh, Lud!"

"But he is, Sarah; you don't know him as I do. He is extremely intellectual, too, though," reluctantly, "of a somewhat neglected education, perhaps. But his heart is so noble, and he has a proudly careering soul altogether above—above horses and coaches and stables."

"Well, well, we'll take 'im for granted, my dear—for the present. 'As 'ee proposed the elopement in speech or writing? You can tell me that much."

"In both, but more particularly in writing," and Marguerite's hand stole instinctively to the pocket of her wrapper in which her coachman-lover's glowing masterpiece of composition reposed.

"I'll bet my 'ead, Miss Marguerite, that I can guess some of 'is hinstructions to you."

"Oh, no; you could scarcely do that, Sarah."

"See if I can't though. 'Ee's dead certain to 'ave told you to be sure to bring what money you can along with you, and per'aps your jewels, into the bargain."

Marguerite flushed once more.

"You read his letter!" she charged. "Now I remember, it slipped out of my pocket on to the chair while you were dressing my hair a little while ago."

"What letter?" exclaimed the other, in such well-affected astonishment that Marguerite again broke down, and tearfully begged pardon for the undeserved suspicion.

"Oh, Jenkins, you must not desert me!" she sobbed. "Save only John. I feel that you are the only friend I have in this terrible heart-affair."

"Yes, my dear; and that is just the way the 'eroine expresses it in the story papers."

"Oh, do not mock me, Sarah! I am so full of doubts and fears—so unhappy, Sarah!"

"Now, look 'ere, my dear young lady!" and Sarah rose energetically to her feet, carrying the silly girl with her and holding her off sternly at arm's-length. "You want my candid advice in this matter, I believe?"

"Yes, Sarah, yes!" The girl clasped her hands.

"Well, it is just this, young lady. This fellow, John Meadows, is an illiterate, mercenary rascal, and, if you do elope with him, you will do a most idiotic and wicked thing! Your stepfather will never forgive you, the scoundrel will lead you a dog's life just so soon as he discovers that fact—in other words, that there is no permanent money for the support of his good-for-nothing laziness to be made out of you—and you will repent the mad step in sorrow, humiliation and bitterness to the very last moment of your life! You 'ave hasked for my hopinion," in her earnestness Luella had forgotten her Cockneyism up to this moment, "and now you 'ave it!"

No need to question Marguerite as to the congeniality of this sensible advice. She was fairly blazing with wrath.

"Get out of this room, you—woman!" she cried, in a choked voice. "Out, I say! You shall quit my service! I shall not endure your presence another hour!"

But Luella, calm and still pitiful, had not reached the door before Marguerite's arms were again around her, and there was another dis-solving view.

"Forgive me, Sarah!" she sobbed. "I did not know what I was saying. Oh, do forgive me! and—and you will keep my secret, won't you, Sarah? Say that you won't betray me to my step-father!"

"There, there! don't distress yourself, my dear. You sha'n't be betrayed, if I can 'elp it"—*sotto voce*—"by John Meadows, the vulgar rascal!"

And with this parting consolation Luella made her escape.

But the Fates seemed to have conspired against Luella's second desired conference with her detective husband that morning.

She had no sooner reached the first floor back stairs landing, as agreed, than she perceived the florid butler, when about to come up to her from the bottom, suddenly seized in the Brobdingnagian embrace of the amorous Norah, from whose unwelcome endearments he was struggling in vain to release himself.

Then, as Luella stepped back a little, laughing in secret, so as to give him a show, as she said to herself, who should pop out from an unexpected corner but good Mrs. Blunt, the housekeeper, who, limping with a sudden rheumatic attack, forthwith went down on her marrow-bones in the very middle of the landing itself.

Luella retreated along the hall toward the street door, but her interruptions were not yet at an end.

A swarthy individual, grinning like an ape, glided out from a disused bin under the main stairway, and endeavored to take her hand with a supplicating grimace.

It was Fraggaponi, who, changing his mind as to delegating the butler to pave the way in his love-making, had thus lain in wait for his charmer to declare in person the passion that was consuming him.

CHAPTER XXIII. COUNTERPLOTS.

LUELLA hardly knew what to do. Before she could beat another retreat, Fraggaponi was on his knees before her, thus penning her in a narrow corner, while he poured forth his enamored tale with a passion and volubility that bade fair to be all but endless, or which she certainly seemed to have small chance of cutting short without creating a scene that would like enough summon Buttons, Gretchen and Mary Ann to the spot, to her consequent confusion and dismay.

Then again, much reason as she had to loathe and dread this man, as being the adventuress's infamous brother and doubtless yet more infamous confederate in crime, she preferred, out of present policy, not to hopelessly antagonize him, as there was no telling to what interrupting consequences his revengeful venom might lead.

"Oh, sir! you really must not speak to me in this way," she exclaimed, in as low a voice as she could master. "You startle and surprise me. It isn't right. I cannot—cannot listen to such hateful language, Mr. Fraggaponi."

"I loaf you! I loaf you!" raved the Franco-Italian, wildly. "*Diable!* *Corpo del Bacchio!*" with his hands clawing at his not over clean shirt-front, and his villainous features distorted with what was meant for an adoring expression; "I consume, I burn, I baff the volcanoes here, here in my noble heart. On, Zarab, Zarab! lissen do me. I loaf you, Chenkins, I loaf you!"

"But I can't say that I quite love you in return, Mr. Fraggaponi, indeed I can't!"

"But I baff the volcanoes for you, Chenkins! I swear I baff. More dan dat, dere is mein parber-shop, where I makes great wealth. Think of dat, Zarab—dink off my parber-shop and my volcanoes, and pe my wife, my plooming pride!"

In spite of her repugnance for the man, and the mortification of her situation, Luella could scarcely keep from laughing. Never had the oddity of his broken English—reproduced here for the first time—struck her as so essentially

comical, while his travesty of the tender passion would have discounted the most roaring farce ever put upon the boards. Still this sense of the comic speedily gave way to nervous perplexity.

"You must let me go this instant, sir!" she cried. "Hark! isn't that Mr. Vanderloopen's step in the vestibule! At hall events, this isn't the place for such a hextraordinary declaration as you are making, sir."

Fraggaponi bounded to his feet.

"Ha! zen I may make him at zone more eb-brobriate time?" he hopefully hissed, shrugging his shoulders till his ugly head was all but lost in the cavity created between them. "Zay zat I s'al! Oh, py chingo, but I loaf you, Chenkins! Only say zat I s'al!"

She said something, she hardly knew what, and, skipping away like a kangaroo, while kissing his paw to her, she had the satisfaction of seeing the solid street-door open and close behind him.

But too late for her total escape from the ridicule she so much dreaded.

"Rather rough on Fragggy, thought!" called out a squeaky, jeering little voice from over her head. "Hown up to it now, Chenkins!"

It was Bob'y Beans, or Buttons, peering down at her over the banisters from a lookout from which he had doubtless been an interested observer of all that had passed.

Luella straightway fetched him a swinging box on the ear that sent him incontinently howling and blubbering into the upper regions.

Then, somewhat mollified and resolved to treat the whole ridiculous affair with silent contempt she once more sought the back-stairs landing.

Fortunately the trustful housekeeper had by this time prayed off her rheumatic twinge (until it should reappear) and betaken herself to other impromptu shrines, while the butler-detective, having at last relieved himself of the plethoric cook's demonstrative endearments, was just in the act of mounting from the basement below, panting as if after a hard run, and with a generally used-up appearance.

"Don't mention it, my dear," was his weary response to Luella's story of Fraggaponi's monkey-shines. "The rascally calf begged me this morning to intercede with you in his behalf, and the opportunity hasn't been accorded me to give you warning."

"But I must mention it!" exclaimed Kate. "Buttons saw it all, and I shall probably never hear the last of it."

"What of that? Bless you! look at me, my dear. Not three breaths left in my midriff, and my false whiskers only saved from displacement by a miracle! Come in here; where I think we can converse in some sort of security."

He led the way into a deep and broad pantry, off of a back drawing-room, sometimes used as a breakfast-room, carefully closing the door behind them.

"You first, my dear," said he, sinking into a seat improvised by one of the lower drawers being half-way pulled out, and offering his companion a similar one. "What about Marguerite?"

Luella accordingly recounted her discoveries and experiences of the morning.

"So!" commented Old Grip; "Aspasie is intent on killing her two birds with almost the same stone. Well, we are not what we used to be, my love, if we do not foil her cast."

Then he told her of the adventuress's plot with regard to young Dyarst.

"How do you sift the matter?" inquired Luella.

"With a coarse sieve, my dear. Knowing what we do, it's all as plain as a pikestaff."

"Tell me, then."

"In the first place, it is probably Aspasie's intention to go off with Mr. Vanderloopen on his jaunt to Rhinebeck to-morrow."

"What for?"

"To give free foot to both Marguerite and Waldo for their respective escapades. Don't you see?"

"Not exactly; that is, with regard to Dysart. Wouldn't such a move of hers arouse his suspicions at once as to her good faith with him?"

"To be sure, if he should know, which, depend upon it, she will take precious good care that he shall not."

"Ah!"

"Waldo will not make his appearance again in this house after to-night. She will take care of that, as you will discover. All day to-morrow he will be busy preparing his forged checks, getting them cashed by his wealthy friends late in the afternoon; and he wouldn't be likely to pass in this house (even if she would not urge him to the contrary, which she surely will) the last night before his contemplated escape abroad. She will see to it that after to-morrow morning he shall rest content with her promise to meet him on the steamship pier Saturday morning."

"But, of course, she won't be there?"

"By no means. She will probably be back from Rhinebeck with the uncle just in time to have him arrested with the proceeds of the forged drafts upon his person."

"Oh!"

"Yes; and Marguerite will have eloped the night before. At one and the same time Mr. Vanderloopen will have his astounded eyes opened to the criminality of his nephew and the folly of his step-daughter. Then, if ever, he will be mellow-ripe for taking Aspasie forthwith to wife; the lost diamond *parure* will be found, where it was presumably mislaid and then forgotten, in some odd cranny of poor Althea's whilom boudoir or bedroom; even the secret of Aspasie's covered arms and hands may be preserved to her on her insistence; and the doating old merchant is her own at last, to poison or otherwise kill at her leisure, that his millions may be at her untrammelled command."

Luella gazed at her detective-husband in astonishment.

"But surely," she exclaimed, "we are not to permit all this?"

He laughed.

"Well, I should say not," he replied, "or for what reason are we here? I was merely outlining the complication as the dauntless Aspasie anticipates it. Of course, we must foil her at every point, and her absence from the city should afford us our opportunity. When she returns to spring her surprise upon the merchant, it must be herself for whom the astonishment is waiting at our counterplotting contrivance."

Here they both started, for there suddenly came a sharp rap on the pantry-door.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MOMENTOUS LUNCHEON.

WHEN Luella had slipped back into the further end of the pantry, which was comparatively dark, the detective cautiously opened the door.

Mr. Vanderloopen himself was there.

"Busy as usual, eh, Squiggs?" observed the widower.

"Yes, sir," calmly. "I've been setting to rights this pantry, which doesn't seem to 'ave been hused much of late. It is still full of dust and Croton bugs, and I may 'ave to fumigate, sir."

"Ah, indeed!" and Mr. Vanderloopen, who was rather fastidious on the score of dust and bugs, retreated a step or two. "But I only wished to say, Squiggs, that I wish you would postpone luncheon half an hour to-day."

"Yezzur; your borders shall be strictly hat-tended to, sir."

"Of course they will. You are very praiseworthy in such things, Squiggs; far more than Bloker was in his day. Let me also say, Squiggs, that I shall probably be absent from home shortly. Shall go to my Rhinebeck estate tomorrow, remaining there over Friday night. Sha'n't interrupt your work any further, Squiggs," and he took himself off, shortly after which the street door was heard to open and close.

"A narrow escape!" commented the detective, continuing his interview with Luella. "He is always nosing about more or less—your rich gourmands always are, for that matter; and, but for that hint of mine as to the Croton roaches, he might have been in here and discovered you."

"All's well that ends well," replied Luella, cheerfully. "Now to return to our sheep, as the Frenchmen say."

"But there isn't a great deal more to be said, my dear. I shall devise means to interrupt both Marguerite's elopement and Dysart's criminal flight when the time comes for such action. I'm studying it up now. In the mean time, you must manage to overhear Aspasie's contemplated interview with the widower this afternoon. Nothing like making sure of her exact game, you know."

"Oh, I know, Ned," somewhat discontentedly. "But why can't you manage to overhear it as well as I?"

"Well, you see, there'll doubtless be a good deal of billing and cooing, along with the evolution of Aspasie's knavish designs. That will make it more in a woman's way."

To his astonishment, Luella indulged in a little burst of tears—a very little one, for tears were not greatly in her line.

"My poor darling!" he had her in his arms at once: "what is it?"

"Oh, I do so hate this spying and eavesdropping!" she half-sobbed. "It is bad enough to be here in disguise, and as servants, too—though that is not altogether without its amusing side—but this, this—you know what I mean, Ned—it seems so mean and contemptible!"

"Oho! Well, of course, it seems so, my darling," he sympathizingly replied. "But it really isn't anything of the sort when you consider that our sole end in view is the detection and punishment of crime, to say nothing of our rescue of the weak and the innocent out of the plotting clutches of a devil—a fiend in beautiful human form. A detective's life is a strange one, Lou, and you are discovering some of the most unpleasant phases of it. You poor dear! Though I don't see how I could have done without you, I almost wish you hadn't undertaken this mean and intricate job with me."

"I don't—that is, not any more," and, kissing him, Luella was quickly her brave, bright self again. "Forgive this one exhibition of wo-

manish weakness, Ned, and it sha'n't occur again."

"Bless you, sweetheart! there's nothing to forgive. I only wonder that you've stood it out as long as you have."

"No more of it, dear. Aspasie is to be defeated, and Marguerite saved. That is the long and short of it. I'll attend to that interview. To think of that creature offering me money! Pah! But her time will come."

"That is the true spirit, my dear. We can confer together this evening (if fat Norah will let us), and in the mean time I shall think up our interposing action for the future."

"You speak of Norah, but seem to forget Fraggaponi."

"No, I don't. Curse the fellow! if there ever was a mingling of the monkey and the tiger in humanity, it must be in that scoundrel's person. However, you can manage to put up with him, as I must with the mountainous cook, till our hour of unmasking, which cannot now be far distant."

"Oh, do you really think so?"

"Indeed, I do, my dear! Who knows but that it might come on Saturday, should all go well with us; and we can't afford to fail at the crisis. Hallo! a good idea."

He had casually glanced out of a narrow barred window looking out across a side area-yard, or driveway from the stables, upon the street-corner.

"What is it?" inquired Luella.

Old Grip directed her attention to Cheese-it, who, with his hands in his pockets, was knocking his heels together at the curb in apparently blissful unconcern, while watching a game of chuck-penny on the part of some bootblacks and other street arabs on the sidewalk.

"Ah, Cheese-it, as natural as life!" commented Luella. "You haven't had any special employments for his talents for some time back."

"No, but I shall have now, my love. That is the good idea that so suddenly occurred to me."

"What shall be the lad's commission?"

"To dance invisible attendance u. on Mr. Vanderloopen and Aspasie to Rhinebeck. You will obtain the particulars after lunch, and I shall manage to communicate with Cheese-it without delay. Run on now, my dear," with a parting kiss. "It won't do for us to quit this place together, as we might be observed."

And so the conference terminated.

Contrary to the detective's expectations, Waldo Dysart, in spite of his contemplated treachery against his good uncle, to whom he owed everything, had the hardihood to appear at lunch, though it was evident that he was under a heavy mental strain, from the anxious glances that he now and then stole at Aspasie.

The latter seemed to be in unusually brilliant spirits, even for her, as she alternately toyed with her food and chatted now with Mr. Vanderloopen and then with Marguerite; but it was easy for the butler-detective, who waited upon the table in his customarily stately and dignified manner (very English, you know), to read between the lines that it would not be her fault if the young man failed to keep out of sight and out of mind from that time forth until he should be hopelessly immeshed in her cruel snare.

As for Waldo himself, he was so moody and reticent that even Mr. Vanderloopen remarked upon it.

"What is the matter with you, my boy?" cried the latter, at last. "Of course, it is a pleasure for us to have you with us at this repast, instead of at your club. But you seem uncommonly blue."

"I am not very well of late, uncle," the young man replied, with a swift, pleading look at Aspasie, who managed to nod significantly in response, as much as to say: "Yes, I'll contrive to see you presently, but we must be doubly cautious now." "I don't know whether it's from indigestion or late hours, but I feel somewhat out of sorts generally."

Mr. Vanderloopen, on his part, was feeling capitally. A moment or two before, he had accidentally pressed his foot against the fascinating adventuress's under the table, and, without withdrawing instantly from the contact, she had rewarded him with a blush and a glance that had set his blood bounding like a boy's along his veins. He more than liked his nephew and prospective heir, in spite of the bickerings between them, which had latterly been more frequent than ever.

"Like enough, from a little of both, my dear fellow," said he, with renewed geniality. "Gad! it's probably the late hours that bring on the indigestion, which, in its turn, and perhaps as a sort of physiological *lex talionis*, compels yet later hours through insomnia."

"Very likely, Uncle Cal."

"At least, it was so with me when I was of your age; and I was one of the boys, too, I can tell you. Better run up with me to Rhinebeck to-morrow—you've perhaps heard of my intention of going. A whiff of the river-mountain air up yonder might do you a world of good."

Waldo had not known of the intention, which chimed in so unexpectedly well with his own nefarious designs. Indeed, he had supposed that a good deal of finesse, on his own part or Aspasie's, would be necessary to bring just such

a fortunate desideratum. Brightening up, he was about to ask for particulars, when Aspasie, who had secretly caught her breath at Mr. Vanderloopen's proposition, hastily interposed. "Ciel, non, mes amis!" she exclaimed. "What

Mr. Dysart is in want of is the strong sea-air. That is the true tonic, the *elixir vitae*, of our Parisian swells when they are done up; and Monsieur Waldo, *pauvre enfant*, is nothing if not a swell."

Mr. Vanderloopen burst out laughing, as he did at all of her sallies, while Dysart gave her a look.

"These sea-shore let it be, then, for you, Waldo," said the former. "I want to have you looking and feeling better."

"C'est arrangé, donc!" continued the adventuress, playfully shaking her jeweled finger at the young man. "Directly we have finished lunch, I will talk with you as to the most salubrious spot, and you shall start thither as soon as you can pack your portmanteau."

Mr. Vanderloopen looked up, a little troubled at this.

"I trust the conference will not be a long one, mademoiselle," he interposed, somewhat stiffly—the merest breath could awaken the poor man's jealousy at this pass. "I have certain matters to discuss with you on my own part."

"Parbleu! but time is not electricity, *Monsieur le Prince des Marchands retirés*," with a compensating glance. "And if I this time give preference to youth and beauty before" (in a thrilling, scarcely audible voice) "ripe manhood in its superb prime," (louder,) "it shall be but for a dozen moments, I promise you. And Marguerite here, *la douce fille*, should take charge of affairs nicely in the absence of both of you."

Marguerite, who had been pensively silent throughout, without attracting much attention, kept her eyes upon her plate and made no reply.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE AIR.

"WHAT did you want to send me off to the beastly sea-shore at this crisis for? Of course I can't remain over night, anyway, if I am to push our elopement scheme through by Saturday morning!"

The words were Dysart's, as a matter of course, and they were the initial ones of the brief interview Aspasie had contrived to have with him, which was taking place in the back drawing-room, with "Jenkins," also as a matter of course, surreptitiously eager for every syllable from behind the heavy *portière* separating it from the adjoining library.

Aspasie looked at him for a moment in unmitigated contempt.

"Bête!"

"Thank you! perhaps I am a stupid, but—"

"Nigaud!"

"Well, then," with a forced laugh, "blockhead, too, if you will. You are so very complimentary, my dear Aspasie, that—"

She caught him in her arms and kissed him—heartily, to all appearances, but not noisily; the sound of a step impatiently pacing the tiled hall without was a sufficient warning against excessive demonstrativeness.

"You dear purblind idiot! Who intends for you to go to the sea-shore?"

"Oh!"

"Ah, we begin to be penetrated by a ray of common sense, do we? Don't you see that it is absolutely necessary to have you out of the house from this time forth until we meet on the pier?"

"Not exactly, belle amante. Why?"

"Bête encore! Are you unaware of how haggard and distressed you are looking?"

"Well, I am feeling like the devil, to be sure!"

"And looking like the devil, too—or like one of his victims, with the gridirons in prospect, which is worse yet. Another hour in this house might give you hopelessly away."

"By Jove! kiss me again, and forgive me my obtuseness, darling. I believe you are right."

"Of course I am! Doesn't this lucky *mot de mine* give you the chance of getting away, not only with your portmanteau, but with a big trunkful of your valuables and best clothes, if you choose? After that, put up at any hotel to your liking. Best, though, far best, that it should be in a quarter of the city remote from this neighborhood. Don't forget. We mustn't neglect the slightest precaution, if we are to get off together with secrecy and dispatch. As for me, I can manage to send my own clothes away Friday afternoon or evening, during your uncle's absence, so as to be in readiness to join you at the critical hour."

"By Jupiter! what a diplomat you are, Aspasie," with a fresh embrace. "You think of everything."

"If I didn't, who would? You will act according to my instructions?"

"Oh, yes! though, of course, I can drop in for a kiss and a chat to-morrow night, when the governor will be up at Rhinebeck."

"No; not another sight of each other till we meet on the pier."

"All right, then."

"Swear to me that you will keep this agreement!"

"Oho!" half suspiciously; "why are you so terribly in earnest about such a trifle?"

"It is no trifle; but of far more importance than you can imagine. When I go into a venture, I do not risk the remotest chance of failure. Take the oath I require of you, Waldo!"

"Oh, pshaw!"

"Do so," imperatively, "or we never meet again!"

"Good Lord, Aspasie! what can you mean?"

"Swear solemnly to depart from this house within one hour, and not to return to it again, or make the least attempt to see me before Saturday morning on the pier of the Transatlantic Company—swear instantly, or all is over between us! Look at me, and judge for yourself whether I mean what I say or not."

Dysart did so, and was convinced. Her voice, manner and aspect sufficiently attested her relentlessness. He took the required oath without venturing upon further objections.

"There now!" she kissed him again, with a complete restoration of her melting mood. "One thing more before we separate."

"What is it, my angel?"

"How are you succeeding with your—business transactions?"

"Capitally! The gentlemen I intend to negotiate with—rich men all of them, and old friends of my uncle and myself—have been sounded, and there will not be a particle of trouble. Have no fear; I shall be awaiting you on the dock" (dropping his voice) "with the cool hundred thousand in my possession."

Aspasie clasped her hands in apparent ecstasy.

"Oh, I can scarcely realize it!" she murmured. "With love, freedom, you, such an amount of money, and all the world before us where to choose! what could mortal woman ask for more? That will do, dearest; no, not another one, until you shall have them all to yourself, and to spare."

"And these shapely arms and hands! shall I then know the secret of their being so jealously and persistently veiled from view?"

The concealed Jenkins, who could only listen back of the *portière*, was unable to perceive the look of alarm that, unperceived by her dupe, crossed Aspasie's features at this question, nor the instinctive clutch with which her mysterious mitts were grasped, to be sure of their elastic fastenings being properly secured at the elbows.

"We shall see about that, my love," Aspasie's voice was heard to say, with a nervous laugh. "At all events, all there is of me will, as a matter of course, be yours. Tell me what hotel you will go to now, and then begone. You hear those pacing steps in the hall? They are your uncle's, impatient for his conference with me."

"What can he want to say?" with a jealous flush. "The ridiculous old fool!"

"What manner of difference can it make? Perhaps merely to speak with me as to Marguerite's progress. Well, one more then. Now begone, and—remember!"

Dysart had already mentioned the name of a hotel. Now, directly following the sound of their parting kiss, his retreating steps were heard. Then there was an exchange of common-places between nephew and uncle in the hall, after which the former's voice was heard bawling for Bobby Beans to assist him in his packing up for the pretended jaunt to the sea-shore.

"Jenkins" was silently congratulating herself on having learned as much as she had, when murmurous voices apprised her that Mr. Vanderloopen and Aspasie were exchanging the preliminaries of their interview in the hall, whither the woman (there was little danger of the adventuress missing her game, that was sufficiently evident), had slipped out to meet him immediately upon Dysart's disappearance up the stairs.

The widower seemed to be querulous and peevish, while his companion was evidently soothing him with her rich, sweet tones, and suddenly their voices sounded at the door of the library itself.

"No, no; right in the library here!" Mr. Vanderloopen's voice was at last made out to say quite distinctly. "I will not talk with you, dearest, in the same room where that conceited young cad has had the presumption to detain you with his puerile maulderings, like enough."

"But really, Papa Vanderloopen—"

"I will have my own way in this, my treasure. The puppy! the fledgeling! One day you will have to be controlled by me in such affairs, so why not begin now?"

"Oh, you impious lion or eagle of men! I suppose on that day I shall be merely the lamb or the dove in your invincible clutch. As you please, then; but the library is so secluded that I am half afraid."

Terrified, Luella had made a vain attempt to dart between the folds of the *portière*, and had been compelled to shift her place of concealment to a niche behind the heavy window curtain as they entered.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SIREN AND HER ULYSSES.

LUELLA was now compelled to play the part of the spy, no less than the eavesdropper; and, humiliating as were her sensations under the circumstances, she nerved herself to the task by keeping before her mind the praiseworthiness of the result in view.

Mr. Vanderloopen had by this time got over his jealous complaints with regard to the suspicious length of his companion's interview with Waldo.

He was a handsome old gentleman withal, and well-preserved at that, his age probably being something over three-score, though he would doubtless have confessed to but fifty-three at the furthest. And now, while he retained much of his native dignity of manner, there was a suggestiveness of second youth, or even sportiveness in his bearing.

After closing the door, he seated himself upon the leather lounge between a couple of book-cases at the back of the room, and would have drawn Aspasie close to his side, but that she smilingly though firmly resisted, contenting herself with a seat on the same piece of furniture, but with a prudently separating space.

"What! my siren," said the widower, playfully, "must you make yourself inaccessible on the rocks, even when you have consented to sing to your poor castaway of the waves?"

Aspasie laughed her sensuous, gurgling laugh, and patted him on the head with her fan for his consolation.

"I am your siren, then?" she queried. "Good! and you shall be my Ulysses. For the younger wanderers over the wastes of barren foam why should I care when I have the veteran sea-voyager at my feet—the home-returning hero of old Troy, with the arms of the perished Hector, conquered from the envious Ajax, as his master trophy—that I may sing him into forgetfulness of his long-waiting, patient-eyed Penelope. Listen, Papa Vanderloopen."

And then, in her rich, melodious voice, perfect in its management and modulations, in spite of the slightly foreign accent, she began to read Tennyson's superb idyl, "Ulysses," continuing it to the end with masterly eloquence and beauty.

The merchant caught his breath and his eyes glistened.

"Wasn't such a man one for any woman to live and die for?" she softly exclaimed, after an effective pause.

"The poem has always been one of my favorites, mademoiselle," replied the gentleman, evidently with a strong effort to restrain his enthusiasm. "But then, Ulysses was old."

"Old, truly, but a hero! gray-haired, but with honorable scars, such as any woman might glory in her lover, and still with the god-like virility and enterprise that could not 'rest from travel,' but would 'follow knowledge like a sinking star beyond the utmost bounds of human thought.' The veteran who could scorn and baffle decrepitude! The gulfs might 'wash him down,' but unconquerable by time's assaults, his invincible purpose could still hold 'to sail beyond the sunset and the baths of all the western stars' until he died! What woman could waste her endearments upon the fleeting bloom of inexperienced youth, with the devotion of such a storm-tried, battle-torn manhood at her disposal?"

Her commentary was even more eloquent than her reading.

She had hardly finished it before she was snatched to the merchant's breast in a sort of fury, crushed in his arms, his mad kisses fairly raining upon her face.

"Good God! what are you, sorceress or angel?" he raved. "At all events, you are maddening, distracting, ravishing beyond compare!"

She submitted to his delirium for a moment, and then tore herself free.

"You forget yourself, sir!" And then she was again at the other end of the sofa, her eyes cast down, seemingly agitated to a degree, the mantling blushes chasing each other over the dark beauty of her face, as if she were but a school-girl amid the confusing novelties of love's first kiss.

Her victim was slowly recovering himself, with clinched hands and panting breast.

"Forget—yes, I naturally forget everything but the madness of the passion with which you inspire me!" he hoarsely replied. "Don't you forget, Aspasie, that you are my promised wife—for some future day."

"I do forget it, Calvin—nothing of the sort!"

"What?" in evident trepidation.

"I've told you I loved you; I acknowledge that much; the splendor of your passion could not but have created a reflection of its power in my own nature; but—"

"My beloved! my—"

"Stop, sir! I must not, I dare not, I will not submit to the danger of your embrace again. Allow me to complete my sentence. But I am not the promised wife of any man—of even you, Calvin—who forever neglects to beg me to name the happy day, and a near one at that."

"Good heavens, my love!" she reluctantly permitted him to take her hand; "can you imagine that I do not pine for the happy hour

with an impatience, a madness of which no other man can have any conception?"

"I can't very well imagine that, my dear. Why don't you name it then?"

"But I am only waiting for a decent time to elapse—what the conventions of society regard as a decent time—after my poor Althea's death."

"Oh, yes; your poor Althea!"

"Don't be offended, my treasure!"

"I'm not offended. *Ciel!* offended or jealous, indeed—jealous of the dead!"

"Oh, my angel! if you but knew—"

"Stop, and let me speak, Calvin!" with her hand sorrowfully covering his lips. "You talk of the conventions of society—you always return to that in your colder and selfish moods. But you forget that I am a Bohemian, who has never cared for such trammels. Besides," sulinely, "I want to feel settled, certain, lifted out of my compromised position in this house!"

"Compromised?"

"Yes; do you suppose people can be blind to the madness with which we adore each other?"

"Give me your other hand, too, my love!"

"I'm weary of it, I say. Otherwise, give me back the old life—space, unrest, the world! If there is no love in it, there is, at least, excitement, forgetfulness—absence from your tantalizing magnetism and passion!"

He made another attempt to snatch her to his breast, but she resisted him successfully, and with an apparently mournful firmness.

"No, Calvin, no; not again. My honor and self-respect are still left to me, thank Heaven! though I often marvel that it is not otherwise."

"Come, my love, let us talk calmly."

"*Ciel!* with all my heart."

"I should, at least, wait half a year."

"Should you?"

"Then, you know," with painful hesitation, "I should have in readiness, for the satisfaction of my friends, some assured—what they would regard as assured and authentic, you know—particulars of your family and past history."

"Indeed! But haven't I assured you that I am the last of my race? And as for my past history, I have referred you to my recent professional triumphs in London and elsewhere. Earlier than that there is nothing, as I have frankly admitted. I am a child of the people, springing from lowly but honorable obscurity. More than this you shall not know, and it is cowardly for you to desire to know."

"Granted, so far as I myself am concerned. But—"

She passionately waved him to silence, and indignantly rose.

"Enough! your vaunted 'society' is evidently of far more account to you than I. I withdraw, monsieur."

His answer was a hoarse, protesting cry, and, springing up, she was once more in his arms.

"You shall not go! You are mine henceforth forever!" kissing her repeatedly. "Why are these beautiful arms eternally hidden from view, love? I will fondle and kiss the round, plump flesh that must hide behind these mysterious mitts!"

Then there was a struggle, ending with the adventuress fairly hurling him away from her, with a low but terrible cry, so instinct was it with mingled terror and rage.

He had playfully displaced one of the mitts at the elbow, and she was clutching and rearranging its fastening with a shaking hand.

"How dare you, sir?"

"But really where is the harm, my beloved? One would imagine that those shapely arms might be hideous, you keep them so constantly concealed."

"Hideous, indeed! Thanks, monsieur!"

"Heavens and earth! do not leave me."

He was on his knees to her now.

"Yes; it is for the best."

"No, no! I'll promise—perform anything in reason."

"In reason? Ah!"

"Out of reason, then—whatever you demand that is right and proper!"

"Ah, love and reason—passion and the properties! *Mon Dieu!* how admirably they sort together!"

Nevertheless, having recovered from her genuine resentment with regard to the episode of the mitts, she smiled mournfully, and permitted him to lead her back to the sofa.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ASPASIE SUCCEEDS IN PART.

THERE followed the species of bush or calm that mostly succeeds an exciting and passionate outburst.

"Monsieur," murmured Aspasie, at last, "you are going away from me?"

"Only up to Rhinebeck, my love, and over but one night."

"Rhinebeck is on the Hudson?"

"Yes."

"Ah, a vaunted stream that I have never had the opportunity of sailing."

"After we are married, my beloved, you will doubtless often thread its noble course."

"Only then?"

She was sitting quite near to him now, with her bewitching face upturned to his.

"My darling! but what can you mean?"

"Do you think I can have you so far away from me, even for one day and night, without suffering a sense of loss, of deprivation?"

"Oh, is this truly your sentiment, Aspasie?"

"You can doubt it! Dame! what is a man's love to a woman's after all?"

They were speaking so low that Luella, in her anxiety to know the result of the siren's drift (though the endearments were sufficiently disagreeable to witness), was compelled to bend yet nearer to the lounge upon which they were conversing. And now she perceived, to her horror, that in doing so she had dragged the upper edge of the curtain, an old one, somewhat apart from the rings above, so that it threatened at her next movement to fall completely, and thus reveal her espionage.

However, the window, which reached down to the floor, was open, and in an emergency she might escape out of it into the stable driveway below, the distance being not more than six or eight feet to the ground.

But from this time forth, between her anxiety to miss nothing of Aspasie's plot and her solicitude with regard to the security of her concealment, she was in a constant state of trepidation and discomfort such as she had not endured for a long time, and mentally resolved nothing should ever induce her to undergo again.

"Oh, but my love for you, Aspasie!" responded Mr. Vanderloopen; "you cannot surely doubt its passion or its sincerity."

"*Cher amant!*" with an enchanting smile; "but you can prove it on the spot."

"How? what shall I do?"

"Take me with you to Rhinebeck."

The audacity of the proposition seemed to startle him at first, and then to please him, though he continued to be bewildered at it.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"Why?"

"Well, there would be no end of talk."

"Just on account of a gentleman escorting a lady friend up the river?"

"But we should have to remain away over night."

She laughed impatiently.

"*Ciel!* what babies you Americans are—or old women, I hardly know which! Are there not hotels at Rhinebeck?"

"No, my dear; but there is a hotel."

"Well, and what is the matter with my stopping at the hotel, while you remain over at your country-house?"

"Come, now, that isn't so bad."

"You will take me with you?"

Her arms were around his neck, her eyes looking into his, her lips temptingly near.

A rapturous assent, together with the inevitable embrace, was the response.

"I feel happy!" her head was softly resting on his shoulder now. "So happy, for we shall not be separated! And yet—listen, *mon cher!*"

She whispered something that caused him to start.

"Bless me! no, no; it would never do!" he exclaimed, quite resolutely.

"Yes, it would. I would take care of the rest. It shall be so, *cheri!*"

"No, no; not to be thought of!"

"But listen again! And you may hold me a little closer, if you wish. Oh, the bliss, the rapture! Now, listen!"

But at this interesting juncture an unlucky movement on the part of the concealed Luella brought the curtain down with a crash, pole and all.

Fortunately, however, it pitched back squarely into the room and over the lounge, completely covering the astounded couple with its heavy and dusty folds; and before they could extricate themselves Luella had swung herself out of the window, with the ease born of her athletic training, and darted into one of the house doors below.

Just as she did so John Meadows rode out of the stables with Marguerite's saddle-horse in leading for her afternoon canter in the Park; but luckily he had not seen the leap from the library window, and did not seem to think it odd that she should be stepping into the house by that unusual way; though he gave her a surly look in passing that was sufficiently significant of his unfriendliness.

"Aha!" thought Luella, as she made a dart for the back stairs by a basement passage that would enable her to avoid the kitchen and its inmates; "we have already exchanged words with our high-born lady-love, have we, and we don't relish the Cockney maid's plain-speaking any more than she did at first hand?"

In the mean time Aspasie had been the first to struggle out from under the fallen curtain's folds; and her primary action was to spring toward the window (where one curtain was still intact) like a tigress, while at the same time plucking out of her dress-bosom a small dagger, which glistened wickedly in the suddenly admitted sunshine.

Almost at the same instant Mr. Vanderloopen effected his extrication.

"Merciful Heaven!" he exclaimed, in an appalled tone.

She turned to him from the window, out of which she had peered down into the yard.

"What is it, *mon cher?* You are not hurt?"

"No; but that dagger—that terrible look on your face!"

"The dagger! Oh!" slipping it out of sight, with a short laugh. "Do you forget that I am a Bohemian, with a Bohemian's habits, my dear? And my face—what of it?"

"Nothing now; it is once more beautiful beyond compare, though still stern. But, good Lord! a moment ago! I thought there was murder in it."

"Peste! your imagination, dear," and she patted his cheek. "And yet if there had been a spy behind that curtain—a spy upon such a scene as ours, sacred to love and joy! But wait."

"A spy? preposterous! These curtains have long been in wretched condition, and should have been replaced ere this. What would you do?"

But Aspasie had already sprung to the door, opening and closing it behind her as she stepped out into the passage.

"Jenkins" was already there, pacing solemnly to and fro between the street-door and the staircase, like a petticoated grenadier on guard.

"Lud, mum!" she exclaimed, looking up with an astonished expression, "ow you did startle ma!"

Aspasie studied her intently, and then drew a long breath of at least semi-relief.

"So it is you, Sarah! What are you doing here?"

"Doing 'ere, mum!" half-indignantly. "Wasn't it your hexpress horders as 'ow you wasn't to be interrupted when 'olding a certain hainterview, mum?"

"Parbleu! I had forgotten."

"But I hadn't forgotten, mum," reproachfully. "And when I made sure you was in heither the back-drawin'-room or the parlor, hafter Mr. Waldo's hexit, I hinsisted with myself that you shouldn't be interrupted, hunless it was hover my dead and lifeless remains, mum!"

"N'importe. You are a good girl, Sarah. Has Mr. Dysart quitted the house yet?"

"Yes, mum; not ten minutes ago, in an 'ired 'ack."

"What did he take with him?"

"A waleese, mum, and a big trunk. Mr. Squiggs kerried 'em down for 'im. I stood by, and made 'im step as if walkin' on heggs, for fear the least noise or jar should hinterrupt you."

"You are an excellent girl, Sarah; I shall not forget your fidelity."

And, with her amiability thoroughly restored, Aspasie slipped back into the library.

Here Luella hurried along the passage toward the back-stairs, where Old Grip was perceived, impatiently awaiting her report.

"You were right in your prediction," Luella said, in a low voice. "They will go off to Rhinebeck together, but no more than that."

"Mightn't she induce him to marry her during the jaunt?"

"No; for all her witchery, I do not think she can shake his resolve to the contrary on that point. He is not completely gone as yet."

"We must find a better place than this, where you can tell me all about it. In the mean time, I have given the boy his instructions, and—"

He was standing with his back to the steps leading down to the vicinity of the kitchen door, and was here interrupted by being suddenly seized about the body by a pair of enormously fat arms, while the cook's face, flaming with jealousy, looked over his shoulder at Luella.

"Och, and Oive caught you at it, ye sarpint!" she cried, furiously. "An' w'u'd ye rob me of me darlant here, as ye did wid Misther Bloker, bad 'cess to ye?"

CHAPTER XXVIII. TROUBLE IN THE REAR.

How Norah, considering her colossal weight and bulk, had succeeded in stealing up the back stairs so softly as to effect the surprise she did was something for after consideration.

As for Luella, she had started back into the passage, hardly knowing whether to be amused or angry.

But this only made appearances worse for her, in the jealous cook's eyes, because hardly had she recoiled before Faith Cure Mrs. Blunt, who had doubtless perceived the butler and maid with their heads suspiciously close together from the open door of a little odds-and-ends room near at hand, glided out upon the scene with motherly concern and anxiety all over her sincere old face.

"Pray against it, my child, do pray!" exclaimed the housekeeper, grasping Luella's hand imploringly while dropping forthwith into her favorite attitude of supplication. "Even if you love Mr. Squiggs to distraction, love itself—this sort of worldly and fleshly love—is apt to mislead us from purer and higher purposes. Pray with me against it, my dear! What would I be for the toothache and the rheumatiz, but for the curative power of prayer? Oh, Sarah! come to prayer. This love is but of the flesh; it cannot endure; what is it to the love and the life that are eternal?"

"Oh—bother!" cried Luella, exasperated half out of her wits; "ow you can twist things, Mrs. Blunt! I ave nothing to pray against. I was not talking love to Mr. Squiggs haney more than I ham to you at this minute. 'Ow 'orribly ridiculous!"

In the mean time, the unfortunate butler-deective, with his arms pinned to his sides by the mammoth embrace from behind, could only squirm and protest, while waxing yet redder in the face than his artificial floridity called for, and with Norah still glowering over him relentlessly at her suppositious rival.

"Don't belayve the hussy, ma'm!" bawled the cook at the top of her lungs, which were of the true Tipperary stentoriusness upon occasion. "W'u'dn't she ch'ate me out av me red-headed charmer, betimes, just as she did wid Black Bloker, wid her doll's face an' her gowlden locks? Oh, no; not she! The Sassenach, aich-dropping hussy. 'Ow!"

"For 'eaving's sake, Norah, be quiet!" exclaimed Luella, terrified lest her cup of mortification might not yet be complete. "You'll bring the master 'imself upon the scene. He is in the library now."

"Ow!" more vociferously than before.

"I swear to you it is a mistake, Norah! Mr. Squiggs and I were merely conversing on business connected with our duties."

"Ow!" again.

And then Old Grip so far lost his temper as to begin to swear, with a temporary disregard of his aspirates that was little short of alarming.

"Oh, do end this thing!" cried Luella, stamping on her foot. "It is too ridiculous! Get hup, ma'm, do—there's a good woman!" she almost jerked the housekeeper upon her feet. "You must not pray for me! I've no ailment or wickedness to be faith-cured; indeed I aven't. When I 'ave I'll let you know. Oh, dear! will you never stop your 'owling, Norah?"

"Ow!"

And now, as a culminating element of the grotesque, Bobby Beans, the buttons of the establishment, hopped in by a side-door from the driveway, with an expansive grin on his face that showed him to be appreciative of the complicated situation at a glance.

"What, 'Chenkins'! at it again?" he yelled. "Wasn't Fraggy, the barber, enough for yer, that you should go to makin' 'ard feelin's betwixt big Norah and the house-afire butler? Oh, Chenkins!"

Furious now, Luella let the young rascal have a second taste of the pith of her good right arm.

He scampered back, squalling, with both hands to his ear. But, horror of horrors! at this instant, while the cook was in the midst of a fresh tirade of abuse, and the pinioned butler redoubled his struggles and profanity, Mr. Vanderloopen and Aspasie came hurrying upon the scene from the direction of the library.

Aspasie, who seemed to understand matters at a glance, burst into a ringing peal of laughter over the extreme comicality of it all.

But the sense of the ridiculous was less developed in Mr. Vanderloopen.

"What does this all mean?" he exclaimed, in a voice of thunder that even caused Norah's vituperations to shrink up abashed.

Jenkins burst into a fit of timely weeping, and sobbed forth her explanation of the affair.

It was accepted on the spot—Mr. Vanderloopen had long been prepossessed in her favor, for that matter, and she naturally had the sympathy of Aspasie, whose suspicions had fortunately not been aroused; Norah was summarily dismissed to the kitchen with a warning, while the butler's profanity was graciously excused, as having been fairly pardonable under the circumstances, and Aspasie took it upon herself to console the weeping lady's-maid, as the incorrigible Buttons sneaked off out of sight.

Finally the personages of the imbroglio dissolved away in various directions, save only good Mrs. Blunt, who, having experienced a sudden return of that touch-and-go toothache of hers, had yet again resorted to the ameliorative effects of devotional genuflection at the head of the stairs, with her accustomed trustfulness and serenity.

Neither Luella nor Old Grip ventured upon another attempt to hold a private conference for the remainder of that afternoon; and this notwithstanding that Mr. Vanderloopen went out for a drive with Aspasie in a hired carriage directly following the incident Marguerite having betaken herself to the Park bridle-paths, with the aspiring John Meadows as her attendant, some time previously.

The last interruption had been amply sufficient for their experience in that line.

In the mean time, 'Squiggs,' having doubtless already repented of his temper in that trying emergency, prudently occupied himself with cuffing Buttons and making his peace with Norah in the kitchen.

"Such another unforeseen attack in our rear will never do," he reflected. "I must, at least, manage to keep fat Norah within reasonable bounds until after the crisis that is upon us, and Loo will have to manage likewise with Fraggapponi."

"You see, my dear woman," he sagely observed to the cook, when the latter had finally been induced to admit the undue hastiness of her conduct, "and some is what and some does. And you surely can't expect me to put up with such outrageous behavior as those."

"Ah, darlin', but you will forgive me!" sobbed Norah. She was now in the melting mood, which was equally colossal in its way—every characteristic was on the wholesale, broad-gauge expansiveness with Norah—with her temper when at the boiling point, though not quite so noisy. "How could I help it when I set eyes on ye wid your two heads together, jest as if ye was a-sprinkin'?"

"That is no hexcuse for you, Miss Finnegan!" Norah's last name was Finnegan, and Mr. Squiggs addressed her by it now with becoming severity. "A lady is a lady halways hunder hany and hall environments. Hallow me to finish, if you please, ma'm," loftily and with an imperiously repressive gesture, as she was about to get in another palliative edgewise. "Why, just fancy 'ow 'umiliated and bunstrung I was! You might 'ave knocked me hover with a feather-bed."

"But don't I confess me fault, Misther Squiggs?" with fresh tears. "And whin ye come to t'ink av how I love ye, darlin'—sure, it's the pulse av me heart ye are, *acushla!*—and how desperate jillous I am, if another woman so much as looks at your purty red hair and them darlin' whiskers—"

"Stop right there, Norah! not another word on that himmodest subjeck. If you do love me, you don't quite hown me, body and soul, 'ide, 'air and hintellects, remember that. And you will halso bear in mind, Miss Finnegan, that I 'aven't as yet hexpressed hany reciprocal 'eat or hamorousness for the sacred flame that seems to glow so hanimately in—in your hambitious and hexpansive buzzum, ma'm."

Norah here broke into a despairing wail, but she was now thoroughly chastened in spirit, and the butler was not long in bringing her into a better humor with herself, to the speechless admiration of Gretchen and little Mary Ann, while Bobby Beans, in crossing the floor to answer a ring at the street-door, went on tiptoe lest he might yet again excite the great man's ire.

On her part, Luella busied herself in the upper part of the house, not caring to reappear in the below-stairs dominion until perfectly assured of inadvertently bringing with her no fresh cause of dissension.

She had succeeded in restoring herself in Mrs. Blunt's good opinion, even without the intercession of prayer, and was putting her young mistress's dressing-room to rights, when Marguerite at last burst into the apartment, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling.

"I'm glad you're here, Jenkins!" and the young girl threw her arms around the other's neck. "You will forgive me for being so cross to you this morning, won't you, dear? for, oh, Jenkins, I am so happy!"

"Really, there wasn't hanything to forgive, my dear young lady. But what is it you are so 'appy about?—though per'aps I can 'azard a guess."

Then Marguerite testified to her extraordinary felicity by bursting into a passion of tears.

CHAPTER XXIX. POOR MARGUERITE.

LUELLA made no comment as she assisted the sobbing girl to exchange her riding-habit for a soft loose wrapper, and proceeded to make her comfortable in a general way.

Then she gently took her in her lap, and pillow'd the poor foolish little head upon her shoulder, as if she were no more than a child, which indeed she hardly was.

"Now what is it, my dear?" she inquired at last, when the passion had been sobbed away.

"Oh, Jenkins! but you do forgive me, don't you?"

"Of course, I do, my sweet young lady, if there's hanything to forgive, w'ich there isn't."

"But I'm sure there must be; I'm so wicked and—and so happy!"

"Nonsense, my dear! you're honly hexcited."

"John has been so sweet to-day, Sarah—so lofty and noble!"

"Ho, yes!"

"It's all arranged, Sarah," in a lower voice, and nestling closer in the strong round arms, that had come to have something protective and reliant in them for the misguided, unmothered little heart. "That is, I've consented definitely, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"And you won't betray my secret to papa—I can be sure of that, Sarah?"

"Dead sure, my hangel!"

"Still, you—you object to me eloping with John, Sarah?"

Luella reflected that the willful girl would have her own way, in spite of whatever could be urged to the contrary; and that consequently the next best thing was to discover all the particulars in the interest of the saving intentions as designed by Old Grip and herself.

"Look 'ere, my dear young lady," she replied,

very gravely. "Of course, I object, and you 'ave 'eard and probably digested my reasons for doing so."

"Yes, Sarah—dear Sarah!"

"Well, just tell me 'all the particulars of your hamorous harrangement, as I think I may call it—"

"Yes, Sarah!" with a swift hiding of the blushing little face.

"Just let me 'ave those particulars, and none of your hown people 'ere shall be one iota the wiser."

This was just what the foolish girl, in her excitement and happiness, was fairly dying to do.

"Still, there are not so many particulars to tell, Sarah; everything is so easy and simple. In the first place—let me see, what should go in the first place? I'm so confused!"

"I see. Better let me hask it hout of you? 'Ow would that do?"

"Oh, yes; that will be the better way, Sarah."

"You've harranged to 'lope to-morrow night?"

"Yes; papa will be away, then."

"And ma'm'zelle, too; though you mustn't tell her I told you so."

"No, no, of course not. But that will be so much the better."

"Per'aps so. At what hour?"

"Half-past ten."

"And John 'as harranged for the conventional coach and four?"

"No," with a nervous laugh; "that is the way it often is in the beautiful novels. But a coach and pair will content us. You see, John is poor, Sarah, poor but noble, and—"

"Yes, yes, my dear; and you'd scarcely be hable to pawn your jewels in the middle of the night. Well, then, John has arranged for a coach and pair?"

"Yes. You know the alleyway that runs back of our stables?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Well, John will be waiting with the coach and pair at the intersection of the alleyway with the cross-street just around the corner."

"Ah!"

"But John won't drive in person, Sarah!" eagerly.

"Of course I don't, my love. 'E, the bloom-in' bridegroom! Bless you, no! 'e'll 'ave enough to do to 'old you 'ard ag'in' his beatin' 'eart; while, of course, there'll be an 'ired driver, per'aps one of his pals."

"What is a pal, Sarah?"

"One of his friends, you know; per'aps the very one as will stand hup with 'im before the halter, or in the parson's back parlor, w'ichhever is the most 'andy, you know."

"How wonderfully you can foresee, Sarah! That is it exactly."

"Well, what then, miss?"

"I'm to be there promptly on time. To flutter out of the house and around the corner (runaway brides always flit and flutter, Sarah,) with a bundle of such of my best dresses and underwear as I can hastily get together."

"Hexactly!—and not forgettin' the jewels as John is so magnanimously hanxious about?"

"Of course, though I've not many of them—not more than a thousand dollars' worth."

"Say they'd fetch two 'undred at the pawnshops—just about enough to go to 'ousekeepin' with in an 'umble and hunpertentious way."

"Precisely! you seem to guess at everything. And I'm to be vailed, too!"

"Hexactly!—they halways har' in them romances."

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, my dear; hafter you 'ave fittid and fluttered?"

"Oh, you can guess the rest. John burriedly assists me into the carriage, springs in after me, after a mysterious sign to the statue-like driver, and we are off like the wind through the solemn immensity of the night!"

"Yes, my dear young lady; and with nothing to break the silence, above the clatterin' of the 'oofs and the rumbling of the w'eels, but the hexcited beatin' of your two 'earts, with per'aps a few thousand kisses interspersed."

Marguerite tightened her arms about Luella's neck and buried her face in her bosom.

"That is it, Sarah. Oh!"

"Well; now as to the destination of this wild ride. 'Oboken, I believe you observed, my dear?"

"Yes, Sarah; by the Christopher street ferry."

"And then?"

"Then the minister to perform the solemn and mystic rite, Sarah. John has already conferred with him. He is a Lutheran, and a very pious, high-minded man. John says so."

"Hindeed! 'Is name, my dear?"

"Schmittenhausen, the Reverend Karl Schmittenhausen."

"You'll drive straight to his residence, of course?"

"Yes; on the corner of Hudson and Passaic streets."

"As John informed the minister that you are not yet of age?"

"I think not. But that will not make a particle of difference to Mr. Schmittenhausen. John says so. All I've got to do is to look as

old and discreet as I can, and, should he ask me if I am over eighteen, to murmur a low-voiced reply that will be construed into an affirmative."

"Ho, yes, I see! What a admirable and high-principled young man this lover of yours must be!"

"I'm so glad you think so, Sarah. Oh, he is a king among men. I sometimes," with trembling solicitude, "feel that I am not worthy of him, he is so noble and grand!"

"Well, I wouldn't be particularly overcome by such a idea, my dear, if I were you."

"Still, I am so inexperienced, so trivial, while he—his dark eyes are like wells of liquid fire, Sarah, they are so darkly, deeply, beautifully mysterious and bright; and then that mustache of John's! Oh, when I only think of the golden moments when—"

"That will do, my dear young lady. We'll take hale that for granted. After the marriage?"

"Then we go to his sister's house in Passaic by the midnight train."

"What is 'is sister's name?"

"Mrs. Jugger. She is John's eldest sister, Amelia."

"Ave you ever seen or met 'er?"

"No; but she is a splendid creature—so sympathetic and unselfish! John says so."

"But you don't know very much about the woman?"

"No; but she must be a perfectly grand being. Her husband is a sort of a miller."

"What sort of miller?"

"I don't know exactly. But John mentioned his keeping some sort of a mill—a gin-mill, I think he said, though I didn't pay much attention, not knowing exactly what he meant. You know, John is often quite beyond me in his conversation, Sarah. He is so grandly intellectual. But I must study hard to improve myself and be a real companion and helmeet to him."

Luella could not find it in her womanliness to be amused. It would be an underestimate to characterize such Miranda-like innocence as Marguerite's as even that of an *ingenue*.

She could only contemplate the girl with immeasurable commiseration and something of despair; and she was not sorry when she heard Aspasie's voice on the stair as a summary termination of the interview.

"Remember, not a word!" she whispered, as Marguerite hurriedly assumed a less affectionate attitude. "If you trust me, you cannot trust her."

And when the adventuress smilingly looked into the room a moment later, Marguerite was apparently immersed in her latest novel, while Jenkins was busying herself with commonplace affairs.

CHAPTER XXX.

TWO SURPRISES.

IT was long after dinner, and Luella had still been unable to obtain private word with her husband, when Aspasie, who had spent the evening with Mr. Vanderloopen at some sort of entertainment, chancing to see the young woman passing, called her into her room, where she had already begun to disrobe for the night.

"Don't think I called you in for your assistance, *ma chere Sarah*," laughed the adventuress, closing the door. "No, no; I can be my own lady's maid on occasion, thank the Lord! Sit down anywhere, and make yourself comfortable. I want to talk with you a little, if you don't object."

"I object? Bless your 'eart, mum, I shall feel honly too 'appy and honored!" and Luella took a seat accordingly. "La, ma'm! but isn't it a treat just to look at you a-hundressing!"

Aspasie wore a hastily-assumed loose wrap, in which she was standing before her dressing-case mirror, doing up her magnificent hair. But her neck and shoulders were glimpsingly bare, and in the *abandon* natural to the privacy of the occasion her superb form was a revelation becoming a convocation of Dian's nymphs at their bathing-pool.

Aspasie laughed as well as she could with a thick twist of the long hair between her glistening teeth.

"You only say so, Sarah," she managed to reply. "But then the women can flatter, no less than the men, when they wish to."

"I never flatter, mum. Wait!" And Luella forthwith took the unruly hair in charge.

"Ciel! this is unfair upon you, my dear. You must be tired at this time of night."

"Never too tired to work hon such 'air as this, mum. La!" combing out the rich masses lovingly, till they fell rippling around their owner like a midnight cloud; "talk of ravens' wings for glossiness and Handalusian 'orse-tails for abundance! I don't wonder that Mr. Fraggapponi is in love with his hart when manipulating your 'ead of 'air, mum, as I'm sure 'e must be."

"I only wish I could have him attend to it at all hours, as I used to. Perhaps I shall some day."

"Lor', mum! and for you to 'int that I would flatter of you. Why, your neck an' shoulders is like sculptur'! There's honly one himperfection, or drawback, as I might say, mum."

"Diable! my mitts, you mean?" And Aspasie hastily made sure of their security, as was usual.

"Yes, mum; them hateral mitts."

"Drop the subject, Jenkins! Every woman has more or less of an eccentricity; the mitts are mine."

"Has you will, mum. I honly—"

"That will do. I wanted to speak to you about Marguerite."

"Yes, mum."

"I half-suspect that she has got it into her foolish head to run away with John Meadows at some time or other."

"Yes, mum; so do I, mum."

"What do you know about it?" Very abruptly, and twisting her head around to accompany the words with a searching glance.

"Honly what I 'ave guessed, mum, from secret hobservation," imperturbably, but with a naturally-interested look. "That blessed child! she can be as close-mouthed as a kitten in a bag of meal, and yet for hall, she is that transparent!"

"Yes? Well, Mr. Vanderloopen is very urgent, Jenkins, that I should accompany him on his jaunt to Rhinebeck to-morrow. We shall not be back before Saturday noon at the earliest. Of course, there can be no danger of the child venturing upon such a mad step so soon—that is during my brief absence?"

"Yes, mum; or, rather, you hought to know best, mum."

"I suppose so. Parbleu! if I deemed there were the slightest danger of such a thing, as a matter of course I would remain at home. I should consider it my duty, as a matter of conscience, you know."

"Yes, mum."

But the arrant hypocrisy of Aspasie was perfectly obvious to Luella, who could with difficulty control her indignation.

"Still," Aspasie went on, doubtfully, "I have observed the girl narrowly. It may be only a passing romance with her. At all events, she would hardly dare venture upon such a ruinous step, without affording indubitable indications as to her intentions. Oh, no; not to be thought of. Her sense of self-respect, which I have struggled so hard to instill into her youthful mind, wouldn't admit of it. Eh, Sarah?"

"Yes, mum."

"Can't you say anything but that?" angrily. "Diable! don't you see the anxiety I am suffering on this willful child's account. And can't you so much as offer an opinion, I should like to know?"

"I hofer an hopinion? Oh, ma'm'zelle, come now! I 'ope I know my place, mum."

"Well," with a little sigh, "I shall risk it, at all events. And when I return from my jaunt, I shall not neglect to take Marguerite regularly to task. If that won't do, Mr. Vanderloopen shall know of the fellow's presumption in short order. I never did believe in mésalliances!"

"Ho, mum! they're 'orrif."

"That will do, Sarah; and I'm inexpressibly obliged to you."

On emerging from Aspasie's room, Luella was gratified at perceiving the detective waiting for her at the back end of the passage, and, as it was now past eleven, it seemed evident that they were at last to have their coveted private interview, without further interruption.

But if man proposes, human cunning quite as often, perhaps, as Providence itself, is at hand for the effecting of unsuspected cross-purposes.

"At last!" exclaimed the butler detective, in a relieved tone. "Come down into the butlery with me, and we can be at our leisure."

Luella followed him. But they had hardly approached the butlery, and were already beginning to exchange their confidences in guarded tones, when there was a suspicious movement behind an angle of the dimly-lighted basement passage close at hand.

The detective sprung into the corner, like a cat, and emerged with a man by the ear.

By the light streaming out of the butlery, whose door Luella had opened, it was perceived to be Fraggaponi.

"Hallo!" said the detective.

The hairdresser was squirming this way and that, his ugly face distorted into additional hideousness, for the detective's iron grip happened to be fastened upon the sore ear-flap, doubtless still tender from eavesdropping reminiscences.

"Yes, Mr. Squiggs, it's me," whined the rascal. "But Dio mio! don't twist again. *Corpo di Bacchio!* ouch!"

Old Grip slightly relaxed his pinching clutch.

"What are you doing 'ere?" he sternly demanded, remembering his London dialect just in time.

"I—I couldn't resist the temptation to plead my cause with Mees Zarah just one time more before going home to my casa." And the fellow accompanied his words by a look at Luella, doubtless meant to be melting, but at which she could not have abstained from laughing, with far more than her fictitious identity at stake.

But Old Grip shook his head.

"It's halmest in the middle of the night, my man."

"Oh, what of that, Mr. Squiggs? I cannot rest, I cannot sleep, for thinking of Zarah!"

"It's a pity about you! 'Ow did you get into the 'ouse?"

"I slept in py ze zide-door beforze ze casa was locked up, Meester Squiggs. Zarah's image, you see—"

"That will do, Fraggy. I ham reflecting whether to notify Mr. Vanderloopen, and then 'and you hover to the Bobbies as a hunmitigated burgler and 'ouse-breaker."

He was really reflecting whether or not the fellow's calf-like professions of passion for the comely lady's-maid might not be a cunning blind for the part of a spy in the interests of Aspasie.

But the bare mention of this threat seemed to convulse the rascal with apish fear, and, twisting himself suddenly free, he hopped across the intervening space, falling on his knees, with clasped hands, at Luella's feet.

"Dio mio! but I lef you, I loaf you, Chenkins!" he wailed. "You will believe me, Zarah? You will not have me locked up in ze gruel brisons? Say you won't, Chenkins! Oh, Chimmeny! what volcances I suffer! and how I loaf you!"

The detective concluded to give the man the benefit of the doubt.

"You should 'ave let me plead your cause with 'Chenkins,' as you at first proposed, Fraggy," he observed. "You are scarcely a success in hemotional hacting. Come with me now; and if you henter this 'ouse sorreptitiously again, it will be at your hextrême peril."

With that, fastening once more upon the sensitive ear, he led Fraggaponi away, and summarily ejected him by the front basement door.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN INTERRUPTION.

"I'M still in doubt as to that rascal," grumbled the detective, when at last alone with Luella in the butlery, with door secured. "He might be Aspasie's spy, after all."

"It is not possible, I am sure," replied Luella, calmly.

"Why so impossible?"

"Because, judging from the conversation she has just had with me—I might say the confidence she has placed in me—she cannot possibly entertain a suspicion against either you or me," and she forthwith related her conversation with Aspasie.

"Goo! was the detective's comment, with restored satisfaction. "Now recount to me, in detail, everything you have discovered from the very beginning."

Luella did so, with such fidelity as a natural fondness for particularization, aided by a most systematized and retentive memory could reproduce.

The double game that the adventuress was playing so boldly with uncle and nephew, with Marguerite's prospective disgrace as merely a sort of episode in the comprehensive epic of her treachery, so to speak, seemed to impress the veteran detective profoundly.

"I've had to do with infernal subtlety in women before this—rarely accomplished women, at that," he said, half to himself. "But for out-and-out, desperate, intriguing heartlessness, I must say that *Purplette des Gants* in all likelihood deserves the champion—let us call it the garter."

"What can be the mystery of her everlasting mitts, I wonder?" observed Luella, also in a self-communing tone.

"The deuce! we shall know before long, to my way of thinking."

"What do you mean, Ned?"

"You remember my saying that I learned considerable of this woman and her accused criminal stock during my Paris detective experience, years ago?"

"Of course, I remember it."

"Speak lower. In fact, it will be well for us both to be doubly guarded even here and at this hour. When Rose Meurtrante is between walls, they may well be gifted with auriculars."

"Well?" and Luella at once acted on the hint.

"Well, nearly a fortnight ago I sent to Paris for the full particulars of this woman's past career up to her setting out as a dramatic reader in London and elsewhere, some two years back, and I should receive a response by to-morrow or next day."

"Ah!"

"My prospective informant is an old and intelligent member of the Parisian detective force, who ought to be informed of every particular—the secret of the covered arms and wrists included, in the woman's strangely adventurous and infamous career, prior to her transportation to the criminal colony of New Caledonia, together with her brother (Jules Meurtrante, alias Fraggaponi), something over five years ago."

"Heavens! you never told me so much as this before, Ned."

"Lower! lower!"

"So, then," lowering her voice to a hoarse whisper. "Can it be possible that Aspasie, too, was a convict at that horrible place?"

"They escaped in each other's company not a great while prior to her startling the world (of course she hasn't ventured back to France, though) in her new rôle. The story of their escape—which I am as yet ignorant of, by the way—is doubtless in itself a romance."

"Perhaps her wrists and arms bear some hideous prison-brands, which would explain her keeping them so jealously concealed from view."

Old Grip smiled.

"You forget that she has kept them thus concealed from her girlhood—even before I knew her."

"So I do! What a goose I am!"

"Don't underrate yourself, my dear; though the undeservedly maligned goose, by the way, is the most sensible of birds, and with the largest brain. The eagle himself is a feathered Aztec in comparison."

"How does the vulture stand? We were speaking of Aspasie, as you will remember."

"Lower still, my dear! be careful not to raise your voice again."

"Very well, then. What after you get this report from your Parisian detective friend?"

"I rather think that with that and the telltale hairpin, to say nothing of the missing diamonds and old Nadka's support on demand, that I shall be pretty well primed for striking at my leisure. Don't you?"

"I should say so! But when will that be?"

"I'm not certain yet. But what better time could be chosen than next Saturday, after she finds her treacherous designs unexpectedly foiled both with respect to Dysart and Marguerite?"

"You have, then, resolved to rescue Waldo, no less than the young girl?"

"Yes; there may be some future for the young fop. At all events, I'll give him the chance."

"Then the time you mentioned could not be better chosen."

"Well, we shall see what we shall see. My advices from Paris are not at hand yet; though, it is true, I might strike without them."

"Of course, you might; and I wouldn't delay it later than Saturday, if I were you."

"Don't you perceive that you most probably will then be in time to save the old widower out of her clutches, too?"

"Ah! to be sure."

"Whereas the delay of another week—perhaps even a shorter time—may see them married; after which, if she could not altogether defy us, she would at least have the Vanderloopen millions at her back."

"True; but mayn't we be too late, after all?"

"How so?"

"In spite of what you judge to the contrary—and don't think that I would under-estimate your judgment for an instant, my dear!—I cannot but fear that she may intend marrying him clandestinely on this up-river jaunt."

But Luella shook her head decisively.

"No. I tell you, fascinated as the gentleman is, he is firm to that extent—he draws the line at marriage—a precipitate marriage, I mean. Why, with all her art and beauty in hand, she as good as flung herself at his head to that purpose, but he wouldn't hear of it."

"But they will be gone over night in each other's company."

"No; he will go to his country house, and she will remain over at the hotel. It was so decided."

"Much can be done by such a cunning sorceress in the interim. However, we will let it go at that."

"You can do so safely. I feel sure of it."

"Well, then, Saturday let it be."

"What plan have you formed for rescuing Marguerite and Dysart?"

"I shall particularize it for you to-morrow."

"And old Nadka?"

"She will have to be seen to-morrow, too."

"You do not seem to apprehend that we shall suffer any further interruption, you from fat Norab, I from this hideous nondescript, Fraggaponi?"

"A summary stop must be put to those nuisances forthwith. We shall have the house pretty much to ourselves to-morrow, you must remember."

"That is true. Now, about those diamonds?"

"Oh, Aspasie will see to it that they come to light somehow, after she has fairly hooked the merchant. I mean that such is her intention, which we are to foil, as a matter of course."

"But, having foiled her, may she not see to it that they do not come to light at all?"

Old Grip had suddenly bent his ear suspiciously in the direction of the closed door, within a pace or two of which they were sitting.

"Diamonds have a sunlight of their own—especially a twenty-thousand dollar set of them," he replied, abstractedly. "They will come to the surface somehow in season, depend on it."

"But I do not see how. Between Aspasie and Fraggaponi, they have been thus far kept secret as if buried in the sea, and—"

Her husband silenced her with a significant

gesture, and then, bending forward, noiselessly unlocked the door.

Then, seizing her in his arms, he began kissing her fast and furious.

It was none too soon.

At that instant the knob was turned from without, the door was abruptly opened, and Aspasie herself confronted them, her aspect the very picture of suspicious resentment and fear.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN UNFORESEEN INTERMEDDLER.

How well it had been that Old Grip and Luella had conducted their interview in guarded tones, whose intelligibleness could not be made out through the butlery door was now apparent.

Aspasie had obviously been eavesdropping, or trying to do so; and now, as she burst into the little room, doubtless in the expectation of surprising a conspiracy, it was only to be yet further hoodwinked by the acuteness of the detective, who, suspecting her proximity just in the nick of time, had resorted so cunningly to the lover act, as we might say.

Aspasie's suspicion at once gave way to merriment, while the fictitious butler and lady's-maid separated, blushing, stammering, bewildered, and with such other evidences of painful sheepishness as were true to the life of such an interruption.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the adventuress, bursting into a laugh; "but this is too amusing. I anticipated surprising a brace of burglars, in a whispered plot for carrying off Mr. Vanderloopen's plate, and instead—Oh!" with a fresh convulsion of mirth.

Mr. Squiggs, his florid face redder than his hair and whiskers, fell quakingly on his knees at her feet, while Sarah turned her back, burying her face in her hands.

"Ho, ma'm! but you will not tell hon us?" faltered the former, apparently in a perfect tremor. "Think of the hagony of it, ma'm! And you may 'ave been at some time or other 'ead-over-eels in love yourself, ma'm. Hindeed, 'ow can it be hotherwise when you are that lovely that kings and hemperors might lay down their crowns for you, ma'm?"

Here Jenkins turned suddenly upon him, and, her face flaring with furious jealousy, she fetched him a ringing slap on the ear with the broad of her fair hand.

"'Ow dare you say hany hother lady is lovely but me, you himperent deceiver?" she cried, trembling with well-assumed rage. "Who was it five minutes ago as was honly fit for kings and hemperors? Was it me or ma'm'zelle? 'Owhever," sobbingly, and with a revulsion of tears, "what helse could I hexpect? Hif you love 'er better'n me, say so."

Aspasie tried to conceal her laughter sufficiently to expostulate.

"*Ciel!* my dear Sarah, you surely can't imagine your *brave garçon* to be in love with me?"

"You're dark, mum, at hany rate, and 'e's fair!" still sobbingly. "And do you suppose I forget the fascination and hamorousness of them whiskers of 'isn?"

Here Aspasie, who seemed most indulgently inclined toward lovers in the abstract, exerted her best efforts to set things in their proper light, and so successfully that in a few minutes the interrupted pair were once more in each other's arms.

"Ah!" she commented at last; "it seems that big Norah had some cause for her jealousy of to-day, after all. Eh, Monsieur Squiggs?"

"Ho, mum! but what would you 'ave? Can I 'elp it if the helephant keeps a-throwin' of 'er self at my 'ead?"

"But you won't tell, mum?" and Jenkins lifted an imploring but still blushing face to the intruder. "Say you won't, mum! Tummas and me, you see, we can't worry well get married afore next spring, and meantime—"

"And meantime you can make just as much love as pleases you," interrupted Aspasie, heartily; and she shivered a little as she drew her loose wrap more closely about her shoulders. "Bless me, my dears! don't imagine that I would prevent you. I rather like people who are in love—that is, when they don't happen to cross my purposes. Besides, I am only too happy in this instance to be disappointed in my burglar-quest. Good-night now, and be good children. Above all," with a fresh laugh, "be-ware of fat Norah. *Parbleu!* if it had been she instead of I to make this interruption?"

Mr. Squiggs shuddered, while Sarah seemed to pale at the mere suggestion.

"Ho, Lord, ma'm! don't mention of it," exclaimed the former. "The werry thought of it gives me the hague! But afore you go, ma'm, would you mind saying 'ow you suspected burglars—we bein' so sly, you know, and you away up hon the second floor?"

"That is easily explained. I thought I heard a door open and close half an hour ago, while in bed. It afterward struck me that it might be the street basement door. Then, after turning the matter over in my mind, I thought of the plate down here in the butlery. I'm not in the habit of raising an alarm over trifles. To resolve is to act with me, my dears; and, as I resolved to investigate, to slip on a few garments

was but the work of a minute or two, and here I am. *Ciel!* an agreeable disappointment, as I said before."

Mr. Squiggs was surveying her with an admiration that seemed once more to challenge the jealous instincts of Miss Jenkins, to judge by the latter's freshly disturbed manner.

"You're a brave lady, ma'm," said he. "Why, you must be a perfect Hamazon."

"Merci, Monsieur Squiggs! you really think so?"

"Hindeed, I do, ma'm! Why, suppose you 'ad encountered burglars hall alone down 'ere, what would you 'ave done, ma'm?"

"Raised the alarm, I suppose," with a genuinely indifferent laugh. "Besides," shrugging her magnificent shoulders, "I am never unarmed. I have this," she produced a revolver from the pocket of her wrap, in a matter-of-fact way. "Then I have this at all times, save when taking my bath, perhaps." And, by a slight coquettish movement, she revealed the jeweled hilt of her poniard just visible above the bosom of her corsage. "Good-night, *mes amis!* and may the course of your true love ever run smooth!"

She turned away with a parting laugh. They listened to her steps until assured that she had reached her room without a pause.

Then the detective and his wife looked at each other inquiringly.

"A narrow escape!" was the former's comment, in a guarded voice.

"I should say so!" replied Luella. "Your tact alone saved us. She is a brave woman, too!"

"Brave? Probably as insensible to fear as the mountain-cat when she springs on the hunter's spear."

"Her explanation of the interruption was natural enough, too."

"Of course the door she heard open and shut was when I fired out Fraggaponi. We must separate now; it won't do to hazard such another risk."

They accordingly exchanged their good-night kiss and separated accordingly.

Mr. Vanderloopen and Mlle. Aspasie quitted the house for their up-river excursion at ten o'clock on the following morning, after solemnly installing Marguerite in charge during their absence.

"This is a new responsibility for you, 'Rita, my love," Mr. Vanderloopen said, in kissing his step-daughter good-by. "See how you can bear it."

"Oh! she will be a charming *petite maitresse de la maison*," Aspasie had cried, reassuringly. "Besides, has she not her faithful Jenkins to turn to in any emergency? Kiss me, *cherie!* and *au revoir*. Good-by, Jenkins! Good-by, Mr. Squiggs."

And then they had been driven off to the station in the handsome family coach, with John Meadows on the box.

Marguerite, who had borne the parting very quietly, guiltily as her conscience must have smitten her, had then run down into the basement (perhaps to get rid of Sarah's mutely accusing eyes) where Norah and her underlings had witnessed the departure from the dining-room windows, thus leaving the butler-detective and the fictitious lady's-maid still remaining on the front stoop, where the adieu had been given.

As the coach had turned the corner at a brisk pace, a boy in a mouse-colored suit had started after it, disappearing with a sturdy, paddling sort of trot, such as made Rowell's style so noticeable in the earlier go-as-you-please pedestrian contests.

"Good!" muttered the detective, grimly. "Cheese-it isn't the lad to take anything for granted, but believes in making a chase from the starting wire."

"Will he be able to keep them in sight?" asked Luella, a little anxiously. "And do you think he can manage to shadow them thus closely without attracting suspicious attention?"

"Yes, to both questions," complacently. "My faithful Ariel is not an ordinary youth, my dear."

"No need to tell me that; but—"

She broke off with a startled exclamation, and pointed to one of the adjacent street-corners.

Fraggaponi had just paused on the indicated spot. His attention, which had at first been directed to the lady's-maid and her companion on the stoop, was now distracted in the direction in which the coach, followed by Cheese-it, had disappeared. His face was a study—fairly wolf-like in its savage suspicion and distrust.

He paused thus for an instant, and then, apparently oblivious to everything else, silently darted away like a bloodhound in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRAGGAPONI.

"In with you, Loo!" exclaimed the detective, in a low voice. "That scoundrel's suspicions are at last thoroughly awake, and we must be prepared for the worst."

Suiting the action to the word, he hurried his wife into the hall, and following her, softly closed the street-door.

Luella had grown pale.

"What do you fear?" she asked.

"Ask me, rather, what I hope."

"What do you hope, then?"

"That the train will have started, with our trio on board, before that rascal can overtake them. They had a pretty long start, and he also risks losing them in the street-turnings."

"But in case he should overtake them?"

"The deuce! our game is then up, or indefinitely baffled, at the best. Distrust, once planted in such a nature, evolves deductions with startling rapidity and intuitive precision. By this time the man—who knows Cheese-it as being in my employ, you must remember—is like enough already suspecting my true identity, at least. A mere breath of such a suspicion in Aspasie's ear would bring her back here with blood in her eye, indifferent to whatever her traveling companion might think."

"Heavens! then, even in his failing to overtake her, he may telegraph his suspicions after her."

"No; in the first place, he can know nothing of her destination. But he is too brutish—not deep enough—for that in any event. He would come directly back here, to make sure. Pray heaven it may be so."

"What! you desire it?"

"I should say so. Hush! some one is coming up. Mix with the servants, as though disturbed by nothing; and, whatever ensues, leave everything to me."

It was Marguerite who came up the stairs as they separated.

"How far is it to the station, Mr. Squiggs?" she inquired.

"A good mile and a 'alf, ma'am."

"And how soon ought Mr. Meadows to be back with the coach, do you think?"

"Mr. 'oo, ma'am?"

"The coachman, Mr. Meadows," with a good deal of dignity.

Luella took this opportunity to slip downstairs.

"Ho! it's young John, you mean, my young lady? Bless me, 'ee hought to be back with them spanking bays hinside of 'alf a hour, at the furdest."

Marguerite bit her lip, but followed him in the basement, doubtless for the purpose of getting a significant nod from her lover, unobserved, as he should drive past the dining-room side-window into the stable-yard.

Full of her approaching elopement, the foolish girl had only welcomed the novelty of being left in charge of her step-father's elegant establishment—which, under healthier circumstances, would have been a source of no little pride and gratification—as a timely facilitation of that mad end in view.

"Och, Misther Squiggs!" cried fat Norah, when the butler had made his appearance in the kitchen; "but didn't the master and the Frinch lady go off in foine shyle? One w'u'd have t'ought it war till a weddin' they were goin', save that they weren't drissed for the loikes of that."

"Fairishly fine style for this country, you know, my dear," was the butler's gracious admission. "'Owhever, there is no blinking the fact that both Mr. Vanderloopen and Ma'm'zelle Haspashie is distinguished-looking for heveryday wear. Hon the Continent of Yurrup they would pass as werry swellish, notto say haristocritical."

"An' is that so, sor?"

"I've said it, Miss Finnegan."

"An' what did ye t'ink av the myshtery connected wid their departure, Misther Squiggs?"

"Mystery, ma'm?"

"Yis; the little blue-gray b'y, as looked like an owl man's mug on a joovenil' body, a-dartin' after the coach, an' thin Misther Fraggypony, the hairdrisser, a-takin' to his heels arter both, as if he war a cannon, an' the devil himself had touched him off."

Mr. Squiggs frowned meditatively, and placed the tip of a forefinger to his knitted brow in a way that was especially impressive upon Gretchen, Mary Ann and Buttons.

"Yis, ind'ade!" continued the cook, who was peeling potatoes out of a great pan of water in her lap, with an occasional glance at Mary Ann, who was blacking the stationary range. "Even Miss Jenkins beyant" (the hatchet had been amicably buried between the maid and the cook by this time) "says she doan't know what to make av it."

"Chenkins ought to know, though, if any one," Bobby Beans slyly ventured to interpose. "Because, you see, Fraggypony and Chenkins—"

A blow on the side of the head capsized him summarily into a newspaper full of whiting with which he had been burnishing up the servants' knives and forks at the butler's command, and his sneering chatter was forthwith changed to a dolorous wail.

"Drat your imperence, you young himp!" cried Jenkins, in a towering rage, much of which, however, was assumed for the occasion. "'Ow many times ham I to box them hosses' ears of yours to learn you manners toward your betters?"

Little Mary Ann, for whom Bobby was in the habit of posing as a rising hero of some sort, looked sorrowful over his misfortune, but both

the cook and the chambermaid, with whom he was but little of a favorite, made themselves so very merry thereat that even Marguerite, who was doubtless feeling very lonely until she should have a fresh interview with her lover-coachman, was attracted by the laughter to look in at the kitchen, when Buttons looked so consummately comical as he scrambled, still bawling, to his feet, with the whiting in his hair, eyes and one enormous patch of it on the seat of his blue trowsers, that she joined in it quite heartily, without exactly knowing what it was all about.

But Mr. Squiggs, the great man of the occasion, who had by this time finished his impressive cogitation, stretched out with a grandly rebuking and pacificatory sweep.

"Let us 'ave a hend of hunbecoming 'ubbub!" he exclaimed. "Bobby," with an expediting cuff, "stop your 'owling and go clean yourself up, or I'll give you something to 'owl for. Now, my friends," while Bobby made off, still whimpering, and all the others, hardly excepting Miss Clayton herself, waited with gaping expectation, "habout this Fraggypunny!"

"That's it!" hoarsely interposed the cook, wagging her head. "Bedad, it's Fraggypony himself as is the chief myshtery."

"In my hopinion, my friends," with a profound emphasis, "this 'ere Fraggypunny is a suspicious character—a henemy of the 'ouse, sailing hunder false colors!"

"Lor' Mr. Squiggs!" exclaimed Jenkins, in well-affected astonishment, while Marguerite, who at that moment heard the coach-wheels turning in from the street, hurried back to the dining-room; "whatever makes you think that?"

"Never mind the whys and the wherefores, Miss Jenkins," sententiously, "so long as I do think it. For some people, merely to think a thing is to know the thing."

"Threue for you, me mon!" from Norah. "Sure, some is born clever, and some is the reverse."

"Thankee, Miss Norah. But what I do say is that them that is caught so hoften, as Mr. Fraggypunny 'as been, a-nosin' and sneakin' around this 'ouse at hall sorts of unseemly hours, is suspicious to say the least. And I do believe that this 'ere same Fraggypunny"—with yet hoarser and more impressive emphasis—"is a furrin spy in disguise, or still wuss, a hoss in a lion's skin!"

The words were not without their intense dramatic effect.

Norah groaned; Jenkins collapsed into the nearest chair with a sort of horrified gasp; while both Gretchen and Mary Ann, not forgetting the by this time rehabilitated Buttons, stared open-mouthed and saucer-eyed.

"Howly St. Patrick!" interposed the cook, in an awed voice; "what an' whom might the murtherin' divil be a furrin shpy upon, Misther Squiggs?"

"On 'oom but hon Ma'm'zelle Haspasie, 'erself?" was the amazing response. "In the first place she is a French lady, and a liberal."

"Long loife to the Frinch! Wasn't it the Frinch that owld Oireland fought wid at Fontenoy?"

"And in the next place, this Fraggypunny is a Hightalian."

"Och, thim Eyetalians! bad 'cess to the divils!"

At this preparatory juncture there were light but hurried steps from the direction of the front basement door, and then the luckless Fraggaponi himself burst wildly into the room.

It was easy to see that he had missed his pursuit, but there was a set, savage, resentful look in his scowling face, and his blazing eyes were fastened upon the butler's florid countenance with a searching and suspicious glare.

"Treachery!" he hissed, in his broken English, which shall not be reproduced at present. "Old Grip, the detective, is at work somewhere about this establishment—is perhaps in this very house at this instant in disguise!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TURNING THE TABLES.

The effect of Fraggaponi's startling words was instantly nullified by Mr. Squiggs, who, with a stately "leave-it-all-to-me" gesture, instantly advanced upon the venomous intruder with a grandly accusatory mien.

"Detective, eh?" he exclaimed. "And is it by such a houtlandish charge as this, sir, that you would seek to divert the hattention of this hintelligent haujience as to 'oo is the real detective and real Hightalian spy that this 'ouse 'as the most need to be 'orrified at?"

"Diablo!" replied Fraggaponi, bewildered in spite of himself; "who and what are you talking about?"

"'Oo but you, yourself, you garlic-heating henemy of the huniverse!" roared the butler, in a voice of thunder. "It is you that are the spy—the bloody Hightalian spy upon Ma'm'zelle Haspasie, because she is a Frenchwoman and a liberal, hopped to the British holigarchists and German himperialists, has would stamp proud Frawnce into the hearth and 'aughtily revel in Democracy's bellud! Deny it, if you can, you houtrageous crost between a macaroni pudding and a horgan-grinder's hape!"

While Luella could scarcely refrain from convulsions of laughter, big Norah, delectated beyond measure at the promise of a row, sprung to her feet with a whoop and a pigeon's-wing that caused the windows to rattle.

"Hurrah!" she yelled, throwing her pan at Fraggaponi's head. "Och! but it's Misther Squiggs as can purteet us from the loikes of them Eyetalian shpies. Owld Oireland foriver, and the Shamrock go bragh!"

Dripping with dish-water and more bewildered than ever, Fraggaponi had recoiled; but, anticipating a personal attack, his hand was grimly thrust into his bosom to make sure of his stiletto.

"What preposterous rigmarole is all this!" he snarled. "You, Squiggs, are nothing more than Old Grip in disguise! That red hair and those red whiskers—"

He could get no further, for at that instant the pretended flunkey was upon him with a leopard's bound.

The stiletto flashed into sight, but it only cut through the air in its descent, so lightning-like was the movement that evaded its lunge, and then the desperado went down under the detective's blow from the shoulder, before which mortal man had never yet stood up when fairly delivered.

"Quick, Jenkins, a rope! And, Norah, your 'eaviest dish-towel! Thanks! from your fair 'and hanythink is precious. Heasy, now! Never strike a hoverthrown man, heven if'e is a Hightalian henemy of the huniverse. There you har! Now I fancy we'll do, you know."

The butler-detective had been nimbly at work on the fallen rascal while speaking, and, as he complacently rose from his stooping posture, the miserable Fraggaponi lay securely bound, with the dish-towel twisted over his mouth and knotted behind his head as a most excellently improvised gag.

He could do no more than blink his wicked eyes and look disreputable generally.

At this moment Marguerite returned, having effected her coveted exchange of words with John.

Mr. Squiggs instantly offered such suave and highly-colored explanations—eagerly corroborated by all the kitchen inmates—such as could not but impress her with the desperate nature of the captive's offense and the deserved retribution which had overtaken him in his misdeeds.

"Now, ma'm, let me hask a favor at your 'ands," continued Squiggs. "Per'aps you will perceive that this desperate willain hought to be put in quod hat once, ma'm?"

"What is quod, Mr. Squiggs?"

"Prison, ma'm—be'ind the hiron bars, you hunderstand."

"Oh, dear, yes! That is what papa would do, I think. Send for the police, then, Mr. Squiggs, and hand the wicked man over to them at once."

"Ha, but that is just the trouble, my dear young lady. Yes; send for the perlice, and at once 'ave a 'orrif sensation—the 'ouse hoverrun with beastly reporters, crowner's hinqests, hinstigating committees, your name hevery day in the papers, hidle people crowding from far and near to gaze at the front of the 'ouse, and hall that sort of hanoynance, ma'm."

"It would be just hawful, miss!" observed Jenkins, with a shiver; while Norah ventured upon a similar interposition.

But, apart from all this, no one could be more anxious to avoid publicity at this juncture than Marguerite, for reasons sufficiently obvious.

"Oh, dear! what shall we do with him, then?" she faltered. "Would it do to put him in the coal-hole till papa comes back?"

Mr. Squiggs shook his head with a superior smile.

"Ah, no, ma'm!" he gravely replied. "What! coal'-oles to 'old that Hightalian conspirator? Bless your hinnocent 'eart, ma'm! not fifty, not a 'undred coal'-oles! But it did hoccus to me, ma'm—"

"For mercy's sake, speak, Mr. Squiggs! Any way out of the difficulty!"

"I might take 'im to perlice Detective 'Eadquarters on the quiet, ma'm. That's what hoccurred to me; and if you would honly be so condescendin' as to permit Mr. Meadows to take us on the hinside of your father's famby coach, ma'm—"

"The very thing!" exclaimed Marguerite. "He can hardly have unhitched the horses yet. But wait! Are you sure you can avoid publicity in this way, Mr. Squiggs, at least till—till papa's return?"

"I'll hanswer for the hutmost secrecy in the 'ole haaffair."

"I shall give Mr. Meadows the order at once." And Marguerite, with her disturbed nerves considerably restored, hurried away.

It was accordingly so-arranged.

Just before taking his departure with his prisoner, Old Grip found an opportunity to whisper in Luella's ear:

"Make excuses for any prolonged absence on my part. I must go after those Parisian advices I am expecting, and shall also have a conference with Nadka Hertzikoff before I return."

A reassuring nod was his answer.

An hour later, the disguised detective, after exchanging an intelligent sign with the door-keeper of the detective bureau at Police Headquarters, was ushered with his prisoner into the presence of Inspector Byrnes, the chief of the department.

The chief, who was alone in his private office at the time, looked up from his desk, with a puzzled look in his deep-set, penetrating eyes at first, and then with a smile.

"Oho! Old Grip, eh?" was his quiet greeting.

"Yes, Mr. Inspector."

"What have you got for me?"

And the stern, soul-reading eyes took in the bound and gagged captive at a single sweep from tip to toe.

Old Grip was not averse to dramatic effects at times.

With a gesture of triumph, such as the Egyptian slave-porters might have used in suddenly unvailing the charms of the smuggled Cleopatra to the eyes of the astonished and enamored Caesar (*vide* Gérôme's powerful picture upon that subject) he suddenly ripped the gagging cloth from the miserable Fraggaponi's face and head.

"Jules Meurtrante," he exclaimed, "escaped French convict from New Caledonia, and, much more recently, one of the assassins of Laban Hertzikoff, the Seventh Avenue diamond broker!"

Inspector Byrnes was a man of iron self-possession, who was seldom, if ever, betrayed into any demonstration of excitement, no matter how severe might be the provocation. The famous characterization with regard to the great Talleyrand would have applied no less fitly to the inspector—that he might have been stabbed between the shoulder-blades without attesting to the fact by a flutter of the eyelids or the slightest change of countenance.

But at this extraordinary announcement he instinctively rose part of the way to his feet, his eyes glistening for an instant like burning coals, after which he was again seated at his desk as imperturbably as before.

"Good news, this!" he observed, phlegmatically. "Coming from any one else than yourself, I might be incredulous, but as it is,"—finishing with a complimentary wave of the hand. "I believe you said one of the assassins?"

"Yes; there were two. The other shall be produced on Saturday—or say by next Tuesday, at the furthest, provided that this prisoner is kept in strict solitary confinement until then, and wholly debarred from speech or other communication with the outside world."

"I have your assurance to that effect, with this proviso?"

"You have, inspector; though I may call upon your bureau for some coöperation."

"Whatever you may demand; that goes without saying. I permit no incumbering jealousies of private agencies on the part of members of my force."

Here Fraggaponi, who had been thus long moistening his mouth and getting back his voice, set up a volley of frantic denials and protests.

Without heeding him in the least, Inspector Byrnes touched a small bell; and, at a mere gesture, two stalwart officers, who were prompt to respond to the summons, summarily clapped their hands on the prisoner, and hurried him away.

"Now, my dear Gripon," observed the inspector, with beaming geniality, "pray take a seat, and tell me the whole story."

CHAPTER XXXV.

NADKA.

THE disguised detective forthwith gave the inspector such details as were strictly called for in the Hertzikoff murder case (until this time an impenetrable mystery to the police authorities), and then hastened away from Headquarters.

He next went to the post-office, where, to his unlimited satisfaction, the eagerly-desired letter of information was awaiting him from his Parisian correspondent.

A glance at the contents of the letter completed his gratification in this respect.

He then presented himself at the ill-omened Hertzikoff cottage.

Curiosity had by this time considerably died out with regard to the mysterious murder of its whilom proprietor.

It was a dull gray afternoon, with stormy threatenings, and the house looked more than ordinarily mean, dingy and isolated, if such were possible; the neighboring avenue, which in that mid-section is largely given up to second-hand-clothing stores, low pawn-shops, Chinese laundries, negro tenements, *et al.*, being comparatively deserted, with an added air of dilapidation and sinisterness in its environments.

The diamond-broker's widow had taken a lesson from the circumstances of her husband's death.

Every window of the little old house was securely barred with thick iron uprights, above and below; in the shabby front yard—for the house stood considerably back from the street—an enormous and exceptionally savage Siberian

bloodhound was kenned and on chain within a dozen inches of the miserable wooden doorsteps, with a manifest willingness to make his snapping teeth acquainted with any one so reckless as to overstep his narrow debatable ground; and in the center of the upper half of the door itself a little barred wicket had been inserted, through which the proprietress could critically study the applicants as a preliminary to the retention or withdrawing of the main fastenings within.

After repeated rings at the crazy door-bell on the part of the detective, the wicket flew back, as if at the touching of a secret spring, and old Nadka's face appeared behind the bars.

She was yellower and more wrinkled than ever. If she had possessed the secret of transmuting her idolized gold into food and drink, for the exclusive nutriment of her shriveled yet active frame, she could scarcely have seemed yellower, with a more avaricious, speculative gleam in her greenish-yellow, bead-like eyes, nor with a more metallic immovability of countenance.

A single glance at the well-fed floridity of her flunkly-appearing visitor on the present occasion seemed sufficient.

"House not open!" she exclaimed, in her hoarse, cracked voice. "Business hours only in the evening as heretofore. Go away!"

"But, my good woman, if you will understand the unusual importance of my business—"

"Don't want to. Come to-night. If you were selling diamonds for a song, you shouldn't come in now. Get out!"

She would have slammed the wicket shut in his face, but that he deprecatingly interposed his strong hand between the bars, and his next words, spoken in swift, impressive tones, instinctively arrested her attention. They were these:

"Nadka Hertzikoff! I bring no bargain of diamonds, but would confer with you of the missing *parure* whose recovery shall bring your husband's murderers to the gallows! Study my face well; you, if any one, should penetrate its disguise."

"Ha!" the sharp, beady eyes were now boring into his features like visual gimlets. "Yes, I should know that face, though it was darker and deeper—when last I saw it. And those eagle eyes! they are black and piercing still. I have it! You were here with the vailed lady on the night when I sat at the head of my freshly-murdered husband's body?"

"Yes."

"And again later on. The missing diamonds—the false ones in their stead!"

"Yes."

"Enter!"

The wicket was closed with a snap, and there was the sound of heavy bolts being shot back, together with the rattle of a chain.

But no sooner had the detective been admitted, and the door secured behind him, than he found himself in absolute darkness, while the sensation of Nadka's close proximity gave place to a feeling that she had glided away again.

But almost instantly her voice issued out of the darkness, a number of paces to the rear.

"Stop where you are!" it called. "On your life, do not take one step toward following me till you hear me say, Now!"

"As you will, my dear Nadka," calmly replied the visitor, rather amused than otherwise at all this cheap mystification; adding, enigmatically or significantly, just as she might take it, "They must obey who would command."

Then a door was seen to open, giving a view into a fairly-lighted innerroom (the same, as the detective recognized, as that into which Althea Vanderloopen, under his escort, had been inducted to receive the startling surprise as to her missing jewels), and through which the little old woman was observed backing her way, with her eyes suspiciously fastened upon his dimly-outlined figure, after which she disappeared.

"The old fool's precautions fairly invite a duplication of the doom that overtook her husband," thought Old Grip to himself. "Now, if she would only kennel her monster of a bloodhound within instead of out of doors, there might be some sense in all this clap-trap."

"Now!" from within.

But even when the detective confronted Nadka within the lighted adjoining room, he could hardly forbear laughing outright at the odd spectacle she presented.

She was seated in a high chair behind a sort of improvised semi-circular barricade formed by old tables and desks placed roundly end to end, with her massive jewel and money-safe, the door of which had been repaired, at her back, that and the adjacent dingy wall, with a door in it, forming her rear support.

Her account-books and writing materials lay before her.

They were flanked at either side by an enormous flint-lock horse-pistol, of antediluvian pattern, with butts within convenient reach of her skinny hands. Lying transversely along the top of the books, a rusty, unsheathed old cavalry saber (suggestive of "*Le sabre, le sabre, le sabre de mon père!*") in the famous opera bouffe extravaganza of Offenbach's) was repos-

ing in deadly serenity. And there leaned against the wall, also within ready reach of Nadka's warlike grasp in case of necessity, an antiquated, ramshackle musket, for whose counterpart the junk-shops roundabout the Catharine street Ferry, that make a specialty of such relics, might be ransacked in vain.

Nadka had furthermore enhanced the dramatic effect of this formidable reception display by donning a greasy yellow turban, which, apart from its fantasticalness, really did impart a weirdly Oriental aspect to her shriveled and time-yellowed personality, which suggested a witch-like figure cut out of some mediæval painting.

She gravely signed the detective to be seated in an insecure-looking chair placed fronting her barricade, and the only one in the room besides the one occupied by herself.

"You see, sir, I am prepared against possible predators and assassins," she said, with a rather proud gesture, which comprehended her arsenal, the barred windows and doors, and the iron safe at her elbow. "I am less unsuspicious and happy-go-lucky than my poor Laban was, to his destruction. They will not catch me napping, as they did him. Here I am impregnable. I will not even permit my clerk to remain in the house after business hours. In loneliness is strength. An inquisitive kitten could not enter this room, uninvited, but that death, instant death, would be the reward of its temerity from one or another of these dreadful weapons!"

Old Grip began to doubt the old woman's sanity.

"Do you always," he asked, "receive your visitors in this—or—rather sanguinary style?"

"Invariably," was the complacent reply. "Now to business!" with sudden animation. "In alluding to my husband's taking off, you used the word murderers, as if there were more than one?"

"Yes; there were two—a man and a woman."

"You are mistaken; there was but one—a man!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ANOTHER CLEW.

"WHY," demanded the detective, "do you think that there was but one assassin concerned in your husband's murder, and that one a man?"

"You will recall the circumstance," Nadka said in reply, "that the fatal night was one of storm and rain."

"Certainly, I do."

"A night in which even a murderer would be apt to wear rubber overshoes, in traversing the reeking streets, even for a short distance?"

"Well, yes; they would also facilitate his noiseless approach upon his intended victim, for that matter."

"You are right."

She opened a drawer in her table, after unlocking it with a key selected out of a large bunch taken from a smaller door, and produced a rubber overshoe.

"You will give this back to me, after you shall have examined it?"

"Assuredly, if such is your wish."

"It is my wish. Well," handing over the shoe for his inspection, "is that a man's or a woman's shoe?"

It was, though small of size, one of the primitive rubber galoshes, thick and clumsily molded, such as have long since been superseded by lighter and more becoming but scarcely more serviceable patterns, though still occasionally in use by the lower orders of European countries, where they may also be regarded as sort of ancestral heirlooms, just as indestructible hats, coats and waistcoats are handed down from father to son.

"It is a man's, by the breadth and wear of the thing," was the detective's decision, after a brief examination. "Yes; a man's undoubtedly, and most probably a foreigner's."

Nadka gravely took back the shoe, and relocked it up in the drawer.

"It was inadvertently left behind by my husband's murderer," she said. "It lay under the body. I discovered and concealed it, without the pig-headed policemen being any the wiser."

"Why should you have done that?"

"I had my reasons."

"Most likely. But did you not and do you not desire to bring Laban Hertzikoff's—murderer to justice?"

"Oh, of course!" with a strange mixture of indifference and eagerness. "But I have preferred and still prefer to do that in my own way and at my leisure. In the mean time, investigations cost money; while rewards would have to be offered. I am very fond of money, Mr. Detective."

"Fonder of money than of revenge upon your husband's assassin?"

The strange old woman regarded him in a puzzled, almost in a wistful way.

"There, now!" she said, with her short laugh, which was a sort of abbreviated cackle; "I don't know whether I am or not. Sometimes I think I am, and then again I feel actually blood-thirsty, and think that I might prefer revenge. It is just about this way, Mr. Detective: I am not only a Russian Jewess, but also with something

of the Russian or American Gypsy in my veins, with all the queer contradictions that such a race-mixture implies. Sometimes my blood calls out, like a very wolf, for revenge upon my Laban's destroyer and, still worse, his despoiler. Then, and perhaps this is mostly the case, my intelligence is uppermost; and then I reflect that it was my husband's murderer who, incidentally, made me rich and independent. Now it is very pleasing to be rich and independent, Mr. Detective—especially rich."

There was something almost childlike in the ingenuousness with which these admissions were made. Old Grip's personal interest was redoubled. Accustomed as he was to encounter diverse characteristics in humanity, Nadka's odd mixture of avarice and the more impulsive instincts was promising of eccentricity altogether unique in its way.

"I think I understand you, ma'm," he replied, politely. "But aren't you sometimes apprehensive that your money-love may get the best of you?"

"In what way, sir?"

"Well, by causing you to defer your intention of bringing the assassin to justice until it is too late. You must die sometime, you know."

She looked up in a sort of panic, which was quickly reassured, however, by the bland benevolence of his bearing.

"Die!" she echoed; "no, no; oh, no! I shall never die. They won't be able to kill me. Look at these stout bars, these terrible weapons. I am impregnable."

"I meant to die in the course of nature. We must all succumb to that sooner or later, you will admit?"

"Perhaps so; that is, later—very much later! We are very long-lived, we Streletzkis. I am a Streletzki, of Godan in Little Russia. Why, Mr. Detective," with confidential cheeriness, "one of my ancestors was surnamed Methuselah, by reason of his great age, and I had a great-aunt, Dagmar Boorendorf, who counted back a hundred and twelve winters, and who might still have been alive but for wolves that devoured her in Prince Poppenheim's forest. Then think of me at only seventy!"

And she actually stiffened herself briskly with an affectation of girlishness.

"The old lady beats me out so far," thought the detective.

"Then you are not in a hurry to run the assassin to earth, ma'm?" he observed.

"Young man, I am never in a hurry to do anything. Even money comes surest to those who possess themselves in patience. But," her eyes flashed venomously, "yes, I shall destroy him, Mr. Detective. When I get ready to act, I shall lay my hand upon my man. Unfortunately," with a sigh, "he cannot be crucified, or broken on the wheel, or torn to pieces by wild horses, or even boiled in oil. No; your laws are very imperfect here. Well, I shall have to content myself with seeing him hanged, I suppose. Besides," brightening up, "that is an inexpensive form of execution, I believe."

"You don't mean to say that you know the perpetrator of the deed?" cried the detective, in amazement.

"I can guess pretty shrewdly at his last name, at all events, Mr. Detective."

"What is it?"

"Meurtrante!"

Old Grip looked at her in increased amazement.

"You're right, Nadka!" he exclaimed. "But how in the name of all that's wonderful do you know this?"

She looked at him in a preoccupied way, as if turning over the pros and cons of something in her mind.

"You are Old Grip, the detective?" she suddenly asked, with much abruptness.

"Yes."

"Ah, the lawyer told me of you, after you had last been here with the vailed lady, who was so agitated."

"Well, Nadka?"

"You have lived in Paris?"

"Yes."

"We-Laban, I and Laban's elder brother, Achimelch—were in Paris in 186—"

"That was before my time."

She nodded.

"We did business in the Montmartre. Achimelch, wise and very money-making in most things, had been a fool in one thing. He had married a Christian. A Frenchwoman, too—a cocotte! Pah!"

The detective had become profoundly interested, and her next words, after a long pause, increased his interest.

"She was a Meurtrante."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A LEAF FROM NADKA'S PAST.

"WHAT is this you tell me?" exclaimed the detective, in his astonishment.

"Achimelch's wife was a Meurtrante," continued the old woman, calmly.

"A relative of Jean Meurtrante, subsequently guillotined in 187—, for the murder of a peddler, whom his daughter, Rose Meurtrante, alias Purplette des Gants, lured to their hut in Les Marais?"

"A sister."

"I beg of you to go on without any more pauses, Nadka! What you are about to tell me can be of no less importance to me than to yourself."

"I can only recall them slowly, my son. After we drove Achimelech's bad wife, Desirée, from our virtuous house, and she had been beaten to death by her nephews, Jules and François Meurtrante, because she had neglected to bring them wax impressions of our door-keys—"

"Hold on!" interposed the detective. "Why, my dear woman, instead of going slowly now, you all but take my breath away. Do begin at the beginning, and let me have a consecutive story."

"If you won't have it in my way," snapped out the old Jewess, in a sudden access of temper, "you sha'n't have it at all."

"Oh, well, then!" with a pacifying gesture; "do pray hump along in your own style, my dear lady. It's decidedly original."

"If you interrupt me again," very severely, "I shall drive you out of doors at the point of my dreadful weapons, sir, and my great dog, Czar, shall devour you forthwith!"

Old Grip merely responded with a mutely submissive movement, and repressed his smiles.

"Let me see, where was I?" continued Nadka, thoughtfully. "Ah, now I recollect. Accordingly we—that is, Laban and I—were perfectly sure that Achimelech had been murdered by one of the Meurtrante brothers, and fortunately it was in our power, or so we thought, to decide which was the actual murderer, Jules or François."

Old Grip made a slightly despairing movement, but, remembering the terrible consequences of another interruption, prudently contained himself.

"You see," continued Nadka again, "after Laban and I had set out for the synagogue, leaving Achimelech in charge of the house, it occurred to me to say: 'Laban, I don't like this leaving Achimelech alone. You know how wickedly desperate those Meurtrantes are. One or another of the Gentile fiends might find means to murder him during our absence, and then we might lose money and jewels in a great amount.'

"At this, especially at the mention of the money, Laban gave such a horrified start, my son, that I feared he would jump over the house-tops, or even out of his skin.

"A very good and noble man was Laban Hertzikoff. Indeed, I don't know of any man who was fonder of money, or more capable in accumulating it; unless it might be myself, and I am not a man, but only a weak woman.

"However, Laban, he presently controlled his praiseworthy fears sufficiently to say: 'It is too late to return now, Nadka, but the synagogue should not keep us away more than half an hour. Then we shall hurry back to our home. But if anything proves to have happened to our money or to Achimelech, which the God of Abraham forbid! we still hope to trust to the police and to Achimelech's long finger-nails.'

"He referred, my son, to a strange peculiarity when he alluded to his brother Achimelech's finger-nails.

"They were almost as long as a Chinese mandarin's, and, moreover, as Achimelech seldom if ever softened them by the application of water, they were that stout and strong that he often astonished us by the most surprising feats with them.

"Well, fortune was unkind to us and our dear property that night.

"The synagogue, which was in the narrow Rue de Petits-Maitres, took fire. It wasn't a destructive fire in itself, but many persons were trampled to death or into insensibility by the frantic and trampling crowds at the doors. Laban and I were so fortunate as to escape personal injury, though we were confined two hours, instead of half an hour, as we had hoped, at our devotions in consequence.

"It was past ten o'clock, indeed, when we reached our home.

"The worst we had feared had happened. No sooner had we entered our business office than its dismantled appearance, together with an open window near our wrecked money-safe, showed that we had been robbed.

"Without thinking of what might have chanced to his brother Achimelech, my good Laban gave a cry and fainted.

"But I bore up a little better, and went into the little room adjoining, where poor Achimelech's body lay.

"He had been stabbed to death, my son, just as my dear Laban was so many years later, in this very room.

"But Laban had not been wrong. Achimelech's finger-nails had done him some good service before he altogether succumbed to his murderer.

"Under his long finger-nails were strips of flesh and skin, which he had clawed from the wicked one's body.

"The police when they took possession decided that they had been torn from the murderer's hands and arms. This they subsequently dis-

covered by microscopical examination. The murderer, they decided, had doubtless been without a coat, and with his shirt-sleeves rolled up above the elbow.

"Instantly I said to the prefect, and so did Laban, as soon as these discoveries were made known:

"Look for Jules and François Meurtrante! That one whose arms and hands shall prove to be thus disfigured is surely our plunderer, and poor Achimelech's destroyer."

"And then we told the prefect of our miserable connection with the accursed Meurtrantes in the past.

"But the prefect was slightly of the opinion that the wicked one might have been a woman, because, he said, of the delicate nature of the flesh that had been found under Achimelech's finger-nails.

"No, we insisted, 'this could not be.' Desirée was already dead, and as for Rose Meurtrante, the only remaining female of the accursed brood, she was but a girl of sixteen, who could not have done such a deed; while old Jean we knew to be helpless with the rheumatism at that time.

"They accordingly accepted our theory, and fell to hunting for the brothers. Too late, too late! François's dead body was found in the Seine, and, as his arms and hands were un-scored, he could not have been the murderer. Old Jean was helpless in bed, and the young thing, Rose, had been sent to the hospital for some curious breakings-out which it had been thought might be the small-pox.

"People, my son, even policemen, are not fond of visiting small-pox wards in the hospital; so that Rose Meurtrante (even supposing that she might have given any clew, which was not probable) was safe enough from questioning.

"As for Jules Meurtrante, he had disappeared, and was not seen again in Paris, subsequently to the murder. So it was generally accepted as an extreme likelihood that the robbery and murder had been perpetrated by Jules Meurtrante.

"My son, we had not been in what is called good odor in Paris. The world is envious, as you know, and we had been stigmatized as usurers. Jewels and money to the amount of two hundred thousand francs—more than half our fortune—we lost by that crime, and not a sou's worth of that property did we ever recover.

"A year later we, Laban and I, resolved to take our business elsewhere, and we came to this country, where we have since remained.

"Alas! what was it for but to be finally robbed here in New York, as we had been in Paris so many years ago, and with my good Laban as the second victim.

"Well, I have that rubber shoe. Just such rubber shoes did both Jules and François Meurtrante use to wear in stormy weather. Often did I remark it when they would come skulking about our doors, trying to get word and some sort of stealings from their Aunt Desirée, Achimelech's wife, whom they afterward beat to death.

"Jules Meurtrante must be in New York. That shoe will, when I choose, enable me to hunt him up and identify him as my Laban's murderer; as the scoring finger-nail scars on his hands and arms will assuredly prove him to have been Achimelech's murderer likewise.

"Now you know all.

"Later on I heard vaguely of the old Jean, the parent wolf, having been guillotined; and it seems to me that Laban once told me of a report of Rose Meurtrante having grown up into a wonderfully beautiful and no less accomplished and dangerous woman.

"But I paid little heed. Jules is the double murderer; he is doubtless still in New York; I can bring him to the gallows when—when I shall be able to bear the expense. I care to know nothing more."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OLD GRIP SUPPLEMENTS NADKA'S STORY.

TOWARD its conclusion, Old Grip had contained his impatience with difficulty while listening to this extraordinary piece of family history.

"Nadka!" he exclaimed, drawing his chair yet closer to the old woman's improvised barricade in his eagerness; "I can supplement your remarkable story in a manner that will surprise you."

"Do so," said Nadka.

"In the first place, why do you argue that there was necessarily but one criminal in these murder cases?"

"I don't in both cases. François might have been Jules's accomplice in the murder of Achimelech, though the absence of the scoring marks on his arms, as subsequently discovered, proves that he could not have been the actual assassin."

The detective shook his head.

"Then the young girl," he said, "could not, before quitting Paris, have earned for herself the sobriquet by which she became famous in the demi-monde—the sobriquet of *Purplette des Gants*?"

"Purplette of the Gloves! no. What did that signify, Mr. Detective?"

"Just what the words denote. The Purplette

—well, was not the dark beauty of the girl sufficiently suggestive of *purple*, a royal purple, for that matter?"

The old woman thoughtfully nodded.

"Well, the rest of the sobriquet explains itself. From the hour of her discharge from the small-pox hospital her forearms and the backs of her hands have been hidden by long mitts or gloves. And yet I have knowledge—knowledge received this very day—that she never really suffered from that dread and disfiguring epidemic while in the hospital, as she pretended among her associates to have done, to the permanent disfigurement of her hands and arms alone."

Nadka started, and looked at him eagerly.

"What do you infer from this?" she demanded.

"The deuce! what more than that she, Rose Meurtrante, was the actual murderer of Achimelech, whosoever may have been her accomplice."

"She was a mere girl of sixteen!"

"But recall her at that period, which of course I cannot, it having been before my time. Was she not robust and strong, no less than beautiful?"

"Yes."

"And was not the male attire her favorite costume at the balls and *café chautants* that she frequented?"

"I believe so; yes, now I remember to have heard so."

"And she was accounted, even at that early age, as brave, desperately fearless, no less than beautiful!"

"As a lion! yes. But then all the accursed Meurtrantes were that. The tribe of Barabbas, allied with that of Holofernes, could not have been more cunning or more bloody-minded!"

"Aba! upon whose arms and hands, then, save Rose Meurtrante's, could the perishing Achimelech have left his finger-nail marks in his last agonies?"

Then, seeing that Nadka was still more deeply impressed, the detective proceeded:

"We will assume then that this woman—then a mere girl—was the actual assassin of Achimelech Hertzikoff, doubtless with one of her brothers, most probably Jules Meurtrante, as her accomplice?"

Nadka hesitatingly inclined her head.

"I have information that goes far to corroborate this assumption, even apart from the coincidence of the gloved hands and arms," he went on. "It was received by me to-day from a *confrère* in Paris. These facts he, at all events, establishes. Rose Meurtrante did not reappear among her associates until the year following your departure from France, in Laban's company; doubtless with the expressed determination never to return. Eh. Nadka?"

She nodded an affirmative.

"Well, by that time Achimelech's murder had been forgotten (you must know how quickly new sensations efface their predecessors in Paris); as for your pecuniary losses by the attendant robbery, no one had ever cared to sympathize with you for them; and when Rose reappeared, thenceforth to be widely known as *Purplette des Gants*, it was to effect a surprise and mystification, over and beyond the peculiarity of her veiled arms, in the sinister but more or less dazzling half-world in which she had theretofore been an inconspicuous and scarcely noticed star.

"Her evanishment had been hardly remarked upon, if thought of at all. Her return was a sensation.

"Her beauty had not only increased to a wonderful degree, but was also in a measure exalted and refined. She had gone out, an ignorant child of the people; she came in comparatively educated, and with some accomplishments. She could speak English and Italian, and in her own language mastery had succeeded to the *patois* and *argot* in which she had been born and bred. That native genius had grounded her mysterious acquirements was indubitable. She had become a dramatic reader of great ability in more languages than one. Even after returning to the bosom of her disreputable family, and seeming content to queen it in the *demi-monde*, she became known upon the minor stage, and was even in request as an entertainer in higher social spheres than she had ever dreamed, or perhaps cared, of aspiring to.

"Where had she been in the two years that had effected this extraordinary change—that had swallowed her up as Rose Meurtrante, the ignorant adventuress of abominable family stock, and cast her up to view again, as *Purplette des Gants*, the accomplished belle of her order, with genius in her eyes and golden eloquence upon her lips, if with the inborn devil still kenneling in her heart?

"It is probable that this will remain a secret in the woman's breast. My correspondent has failed to throw light upon the mystery, after the most diligent inquiry; though he hints of an old rumor to the effect that a rich and eccentric Englishman had been responsible for the girl's remodeling, so to speak, and had then, doubtless despairing of his *protégée*'s incorrigible depravity underneath the veneer which he had elaborated, washed his hands of her forever."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PURPLETTE DES GANTS."

NADKA HERTZIKOFF had become as profoundly interested in the detective's supplement to her piece of family history as he had been in her original disclosures.

She was leaning forward, her bony elbows resting on the table, her eyes fastened upon his face, and apparently oblivious even to her cupidity in the fascination of the weird supplementary story which she herself had in a certain measure evoked.

"Accepting or discarding that rumor at its worth," continued Old Grip, "we will not trouble ourselves as to the mystery of the transformation that had been effected in this terrible being's personality.

"Her history for two or three years subsequent to that transformation is a matter of personal knowledge with me.

Apparently more or less indifferent to her golden opportunities for elevating herself in the world, or at least extricating herself from her criminal family connections, she persisted in maintaining *quasi* friendly relations with her father and brother (Jules had reappeared in his old haunts unquestioned) at first, and finally went back to live with them in *Les Marais*, to the disgust of those who might have assisted in a 'career.'

"It was an illustration of heredity—of the born criminal-adventuress, either by depraved choice or through irresistible native tendencies, deliberately stepping back, out of the palatial artificiality with which she had become temporarily familiarized, into the slums from which her poisonous beauty and evil instincts had extracted their origin back through generations of ancestral perversity and vice. It was little wonder that Zola, the high priest of noisome realism in fiction, should have eagerly appropriated such a character as the prototype of his indelicate *Nana*.

"Her wonderful beauty and fascinations remained undeteriorated, however, if they did not, indeed, become more pronounced by the very perversity which might have hopelessly vitiated their attractiveness in another; and, as long as this was the case, Purplette des Gants was not lacking in admirers, many of them among the richest and highest placed, if not the best principled or most fastidious, in the capital of the gay world.

"Her downfall was at hand, however. Her father was arrested for the mercenary murder of the commercial agent to whom I have alluded, Jules and Rose being also charged with active complicity in the crime.

"The parent criminal expiated his offense on the scaffold; the brother and sister were sentenced to a long term of transportation.

"Could any woman, save Purplette des Gants, have triumphed out of such a stroke of outrageous fortune?

"She could and did.

"She is now in this city, seemingly on the high road to a great success; and her brother, Jules Meurtrante, is at her beck and call."

Old Nadka leaned forward yet further.

"Escaped?" was the question that broke from her slit-like lips.

He nodded.

"Yes; they are said to have effected their escape from the Island of New Caledonia, in the South Pacific, first to New South Wales, thence to England, after unheard-of adventures and hardships, something like three years ago."

"But the girl's beauty?—or she must be a woman now."

"A woman of bewildering dark beauty and scarcely exemplified fascinations. Time and crime alike seem to pass over her head merely to freshen, as with dewdrops, the rich flower of her beauty."

"And she is here—here with Jules in New York?"

"Yes. Now do you think it probable that two might have been engaged in Laban Hertzikoff's murder?"

"It is possible."

"It is certain. Look!" he laid the gold hair-pin before her, with the necessary words of explanation. "This find as against the overshoes in your possession, Nadka. Now what do you think, Nadka?"

"As you do." She was still examining the pin. "This," reflectively, and with the pawn-broker's cunning, "might be only plated, and perhaps not with the best gold, at that, my friend. Yet I could let you have five dollars on it, though precious stones are my specialty."

The detective mastered his disgust with some difficulty.

"I'm not pawning blood-clews, especially when not my own property," he replied, taking back the hair-pin. "Let me also have the overshoes in your possession. I shall then engage to bring both sister and brother under arrest, within thirty-six hours at the furthest, with the gallows staring them in the face."

"Ha! my Laban would then be avenged?"

"As a matter of course."

"But the expense to me?"

"Shall be nothing!—Curse your cupidity, not astiver!"

"My son," with eerie dignity, "you must

curse nothing in connection with me. Otherwise, I shall run you out of my house at the point of my deadly weapons, when my great dog Czar will devour you forthwith."

"Well, then, my good Nadka, my dear Nadka, you shall be at no expense—not the slightest."

"That is better, Mr. Detective. Well, then, I shall think the matter over."

The detective quietly arose and put on his hat, while still confronting her, but with a stern look.

"You shall not have five minutes to vacillate, like a shuttle-cock, between your infernal avarice and your sense of humanity!" he exclaimed, with the metallic ring to his voice that could be so impressive. "You will hand me over that rubber shoe this instant or—accept the consequences!"

The yellow of her withered face had sickled over with a suggestion of pallor, and she had grasped the butts of her ridiculous old pistols, one with either hand; but, as there was no personality in her visitor's voice and manner, notwithstanding that both were threatening, she sunk back in her tall chair, like a sort of sacred monkey, or Hindoo brass idol galvanized into the semblance of life, and regarded him questioningly.

"What consequences?" she gasped.

"A suit shall be at once instituted against your estate for the value of the *parure* of diamonds—twenty thousand dollars—which you failed to produce when the lady who had pledged them to your husband would have redeemed them in my presence."

"Ha! the diamonds?"

"The pawn-certificate is now in my possession. Suppose you produce the property now at my demand?"

"But they disappeared, as you know!"

"That is your concern, not mine."

"I have only the substitutes, the imitations, which the lady refused to take."

"I should say so. Well, my very dear woman, I am not accepting false diamonds for true ones any more willingly than she."

"But the vailed lady herself?"

"She is dead."

"Aha!"

"Don't cackle prematurely. Her husband shall attend to suing you, if necessary. He is one of New York's many-times millionaires."

"I don't believe it."

"Perhaps you have heard his name, though—Mr. Calvin Vanderloopen."

"What! the very wealthy Mr. Vanderloopen?"

"The same."

"Mr. Detective, here is the thing you desire. *Ouf!* what should I care for a miserable rubber shoe—though it might fetch two or three pennies at the junkman's, for that matter."

From Nadka's the detective hastened to the Washington Square apartment-house, where, after a significant interview with the janitor, he obtained access to Fraggaponi's shop and sleeping-room.

After some rummaging in the latter, he discovered the mate to the rubber overshoes he had obtained of Nadka, together with the pair of shoes over which they had been worn, all of which he summarily appropriated.

"Fraggy, my boy," he said to himself, "I rather think that I have got you dead, at least."

CHAPTER XL.
THE ELOPEMENT.

IT was late in the afternoon when the butler-detective returned to his charge in the rich man's house through the rain-storm, which, after long threatenings, had at last opened its floodgates over the metropolis.

But, though dripping wet, he was in high good-humor with himself, as may well be supposed, and he was so fortunate as to obtain an uninterrupted interview with Luella in the butler directly after exchanging his wet clothes for dry ones.

"How have you all got on here during my absence?" was his first question, after briefly recounting to her the successes of his "day off."

"Very smoothly," she replied. "I carried Miss Clayton's luncheon up-stairs to her, and she has doubtless hardly been aware of your prolonged absence. In the kitcaen, of course, they have been wondering."

"Let them continue to wonder. Our stay in this house is, fortunately, now almost at an end. We shall have to get the servants to bed early, however; as you and I must necessarily be away for the greater part of the night, if not longer. Luckily, big Norah is pretty fond of her beer."

"That can be arranged, and, of course, Marguerite will be glad of a sleepy household."

"Has she had interviews with her coachman during the day?"

"Two, at least; and I am pretty sure everything is definitely arranged between them, according to their original programme."

"Good! Miss Clayton will come down to dinner?"

"Yes; for the sake of appearances, I suppose.

And, if she can't eat the excellent dinner Norah is getting ready, there are those below stairs to dispose of it."

"I warrant you!"

Then he succinctly unfolded to her his plans for the night and the following day, which met with her unqualified approval.

Marguerite dined in solitary state, Mr. Squiggs waiting upon her with even more than his accustomed gravity, until she began to manifest a desire for his affability, when he was laboriously responsive.

"Lonely, ma'm; is it?" he snavely replied to her opening remark. "Ha, I can believe you, ma'm. Still, when you 'ave a fine 'ouse'old of your own, ma'm, as I trust you will 'ave some day, and at no werry distant day, heither, ma'm, you can horder heverything to your likin' hinside and hout, and society will be at your feet, ma'm."

"But I am not so certain of that, Mr. Squiggs," sighed the girl, trying to smile as she merely trifled with the viands. "Perhaps I might marry a gentleman in humble circumstances, you know," with a forced little laugh.

"You, ma'm? Oh, Lor' bless me! I can 'ardly think it possible."

"Still, I'll have to marry the man I love, you know."

"But he won't 'ave no business to be in 'umble succumstances, hallow me to observe, miss."

"But he mightn't be able to help himself, though."

"Then 'ee shouldn't 'ave the beastly assurance, hallow me to continue, ma'm, to pay 'is haddresses to such a sweet young lady as yourself, ma'm, as 'as been used to the bunlimited luxuries of a helegant 'ome such as this."

"Oh, one might do without them, if one were happy, Mi. Squiggs! What, after all, are the luxuries of life, compared with perfect love?"

But Mr. Squiggs only shook his head, and reflectively smoothed down the napkin hanging over his arm with a professional gesture.

"Love comes and goes, like the hatmosphere, ma'm," he sententiously replied. "Now you 'ave it, and now you don't. One day it's 'ere; next day it haren't. While a 'appy and helegant home—sometimes when we let 'er go, she don't come back in an 'urry, ma'm."

Marguerite burst into her genuine girlish laugh. In spite of her anxiety over the mad step she was about to take, Mr. Squiggs's quaint Cockneyisms could still amuse her, and, moreover, it was with a renewed sense of security for her that he should seem so absolutely unsuspicous of her intention.

"I can't agree with you as to the love part of your premises, Mr. Squiggs," she said, more soberly. "God Himself is love, you know."

"Ha, yes, miss!" amiably. "But we 'uns haren't God."

"Oh, Thomas, of course!" but still with another laugh. "That's almost blasphemous!"

"Ho, no, begging your parding, miss; but honly an 'umble statement. Not near so howdacious as for a hunderstrapping chap without a farding to his name a-ventur'ing to make hup to a young lady like you; though, of course, that is haltogether hout of the question."

Marguerite bit her lips, gave Mr. Squiggs no further encouragement, and, hurriedly finishing the lonely repast, of which she had really tasted but little, returned to her room.

By ten o'clock the quiet which it is customary to attribute to the midnight reigned throughout the house.

The butler had been calculatingly lavish with the Vanderlooper bottled beer among his kitchen mates, and all were abed, with the exception of Luella and himself.

Marguerite had dismissed her maid for the night, half an hour previously, pleading indisposition, and was presumably awaiting the appointed hour for her elopement.

Such was the state of affairs when Old Grip paused for a few parting words with his wife at the door of her own room.

"Well?" she asked.

"All is in readiness," he responded, in a low tone. "Slip out of the house at once and await me at our hotel apartments."

"You are thoroughly prepared?"

"Thoroughly. I have only to visit my room for the purpose of making some changes in my attire. *Au revoir!*"

Luella was all in readiness for the street.

They exchanged a noiseless kiss at parting, and, accompanying her to the main staircase, he leaned over the balusters till assured that she had quitted the house.

On his way to his own room he had to pass Mr. Vanderlooper's room-door.

As he was doing so, he was surprised at seeing a man stealthily approaching it from the direction of the servants' staircase.

There was sufficient light for him to recognize the intruder as John Meadows (whose sleeping-room was not in the dwelling, but over the carriage-house); and it was with no little satisfaction that he slipped out of sight as the fellow cautiously entered his master's bed-chamber, and lighted the gas.

We say that this was to the detective's satisfaction, because it was instantly obvious to him that the sentimental coachman was thus sur-

repetitiously in the house for the purpose of robbing his employer as an initiatory to his elopement with the step-daughter; but he was scarcely prepared for the extent of the little side-plot assubsequently developed, notwithstanding that its outcome was but little less gratifying.

Meadows noiselessly broke open Mr. Vanderloopen's desk, in which it was known that there was some money mostly kept; and, having abstracted a plump pocketbook therefrom, whose contents he gloatingly examined, turned out the light, and retraced his steps, followed discreetly by the cat-footed detective, who had witnessed the theft.

Meadows thence proceeded directly to the room of the butler himself; where, after selecting two or three bank-notes from the stolen money, he carefully tucked them away in the waistcoat pocket of the best suit of clothes hanging from hooks on the wall; and then chucklingly took his departure.

CHAPTER XLI.

A MAD STEP WELL FOILED.

"EXCELLENT!" thought the detective, whom nothing of these extraordinary performances had escaped. "Could anything be better?"

And he rubbed his hands as he proceeded to make himself ready for the night's adventure.

When he slipped out of his room and down-stairs, five minutes later, one might have supposed at a first glance that he was none other than the rascally coachman himself, so faithfully were the latter's externals imitated, in the matter of great-coat, hat, and the muffling of the lower part of the face, while the two men were coincidentally of about the same height and build.

Making sure that Marguerite had not yet quitted the house, though, upon listening at her door, he could hear her moving about the rooms with hurried movements, the detective paused at the street-door to consult his time-piece.

A quarter past ten!

No time was to spare.

It was raining and blowing furiously as he slipped out of the house and around the street-corner.

The coach-and-pair were already in waiting at the stable alley-way entrance; with the driver on the box, and John Meadows standing at the horses' heads.

The last-named individual was apparently in some disquietude concerning a couple of men who stood silently in the rain on the opposite sidewalk.

The detective walked straight up to Meadows, who, an instant later was helpless in his iron clutch, with a revolver clapped to his head.

At the same instant, Old Grip said to the man on the box:

"If you say a word or whip up before I give you the signal, my man, it will mean a bullet in your nob!" while he also signaled to the strangers, who responded by running to his side with praiseworthy alertness.

"Here is your man, my friends," continued the detective, coolly. "He has just robbed his master of a wallet which will be found on his person. Quick!"

The two "strangers" proved to be detective-policemen provided by Inspector Byrnes for the occasion.

Before the astounded Meadows could think of resisting or making an outcry, he was securely gagged and handcuffed, directly after which he was hustled off through the rain by his custodians.

The entire coup had not occupied more than sixty seconds.

The driver on the box in the mean time had remained like a statue.

He continued to remain so, with the exception of a sullen nod of acquiescence, after Old Grip had sprung to his side and whispered a few significant words in his ear.

Then the detective had hardly taken his stand expectantly at the coach-door when a graceful but muffled little feminine figure, carrying a small portmanteau, appeared hesitatingly from around the corner.

As he approached and relieved her of the portmanteau, Marguerite nestled to his side with a little sigh of relief.

"At last, John, at last!" she murmured. "Quick! get me inside the coach, or I may repent before it is too late. Oh!" half-sobbing; "I feel so dreadfully!"

A great silent wrath went up in the detective's honest heart against the designing scoundrel who would have so eagerly misled this wayward child to miserable after-regret and sorrow.

He could feel her trembling like a frightened bird.

With no other response than a pressure of the poor little gloved hand he placed her in the coach, got in after her, and the coachman, agreeable to vastly amended instructions, drove off through windy darkness and the rain.

Marguerite stifled her sobs at this juncture, and would have trustingly cast herself in her companion's arms, but that he gently restrained the movement, while keeping her close to his side with a protecting clasp of his strong arm.

"What, John! not one word or greeting kiss

for me even yet?" she was looking up into his muffled face, but fortunately the interior of the coach was quite dark. "Well," half-resignedly, "perhaps we are not wholly secure until on the other side of the river. Is that it?"

Fearing the shock of a surprise while traversing the public streets, the detective reluctantly resolved to keep up the deception to the last.

"Yes, my dear," he softly answered, imitating Meadows's voice and manner as best he could—and he was an adept in this regard.

"Oh, I am beginning to feel braver and happier already! You will always love me, John? You will never give me cause to regret this step?"

"This step—never, my dear!"

"Oh, that is so sweetly emphatic! But how ungenerous of me to even question the future that will be spent with you! And John?" even more eagerly.

"Yes, Rita!"

"I have done just as you were so anxious for me to do—brought everything with me!"

"Oh, ah! the—er—money and jewels, eh?"

"Yes; there is only a little over a hundred dollars to be sure—all that I have been able to save up out of what papa has allowed me for a long time. But then my jewels"—she designated them over in detail with childish satisfaction—"if we get very hard up before papa consents to forgive us, they ought to fetch enough money for a good while. Oughtn't they, darling?"

"Yes, yes; I suppose so."

But here Marguerite threw her arms around her companion, and kissed him effusively in the obscurity.

It was exquisitely embarrassing, to say the least, and the detective was fearful that his false whiskers would betray him while the embrace lasted, which was fortunately but for an instant, but they did not, strange to say.

"There!" she cried, triumphantly, as she once more nestled comfortably within his arm-clasp: "that shall last me till we reach the minister's house in Hoboken. Oh, you darling!"

"I've been compelled to make something of a change in our programme, dearest," the fictitious lover explained, after a pause. "We sha'n't go direct to Hoboken. I have arranged to stop first at a nice hotel on this side of the river, for the purpose of introducing you to a sweet lady friend of mine."

She was considerably alarmed at this piece of intelligence, but made divers explanations by which he finally managed to restore her confidence.

"But wait, John!" she exclaimed, at last. "We sha'n't miss our train to Passaic, I hope?"

"My dear girl! we shall not miss any train that we ought to take."

"Your sister will be anxiously expecting us, you know. Oh, I am so sure I shall like and love her, if only for your sake, John!"

Here they reached their destination, much to Old Grip's relief, as may well be imagined.

A few minutes later, with his face almost completely muffled from view, much to Marguerite's mystification, as they traversed the lighted halls and staircases of the hotel, he ushered her into Luella's presence.

The rescued girl started back in amazement, for it was in her lady's-maid's character that Luella greeted her.

"Sarah!" she faltered; "you here?"

With a few expert manipulations, Sarah Jenkins disappeared, and Luella, who was a stranger to Marguerite in her own character, stood in her place.

"Who are you? What does it all mean?" gasped the young girl. "John!"

But John had given place in his turn to Mr. Squiggs, who even before her eyes, with a few passes, gave way to the swarthy, dark-muscled, eagle-eyed detective, whom she now recalled to mind in a dazed way.

"Mr. Grippon, my mother's former friend!" she stammered. "What does it all mean? Why are you with me here?"

"To save you!" was the sympathetic response.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN GOOD HANDS.

MARGUERITE staggered, and would have fallen, but that Luella caught her, and bore her to a divan.

Then, seeing that the girl was recovering from her primary shock of bewilderment, Old Grip lost no time in explaining to her the parts that Luella and he had so long enacted in her step-father's household, and the nature of the clever ruse of which she had just been the fortunate victim.

"Why has all this been done?" he said, in conclusion. "Marguerite Clayton, it was in accordance with a solemn covenant entered into between your dying mother and myself. I swore to her that I would secretly watch over you, and shield you from the baleful machinations of that beautiful fiend in human form, Aspasie Molière-Siddons, as she calls herself. Thus far, at least, I have kept my covenant with the dead!"

"But Aspasie!" exclaimed Marguerite, still

only half-consoled. "What had she to do with my intended elopement with John Meadows?"

"Everything! In the first place, question your experience truly with her, and then say if she has not secretly, disguisedly abetted you in this mad step, even while pretending to caution you against it."

Marguerite, after a few moments of troubled reflection, was forced to admit that this was so.

"She will return to-morrow," continued the detective, "fully expecting to learn of your flight and consequent disgrace; for none can know better than she that your step-father would, under these circumstances, relentlessly cast you off forever. Waldo Dysart will be on an ocean steamship pier to-morrow morning, with one hundred thousand dollars, the proceeds of cunning forgeries of his uncle's signature, in his pockets, and having in his heart this false woman's solemn promise to meet him there, for the purpose of absconding to foreign shores in his company. Her real intention is to betray him to the benefactor whom he will have robbed, and have him arrested on the vessel before she can quit her pier, with the evidences of his criminality on his person."

Marguerite gave a horrified exclamation, and looked aghast.

"Do you not see?" the detective went on. "Your ruin and Waldo's will thus have been effected by the same treacherous band, and almost at a single stroke. Your step-father and his millions will then be exclusively at her disposal; for he is already amid the toils of her fatal fascinations, and she means to marry him at an early day."

The girl covered her face with her hands.

"Why does God permit such wickedness?" she sobbed. "Poor Waldo!"

"Do not fear for him," interposed Old Grip, quietly. "He shall be saved as indubitably as you have been saved. And I will see to it that you shall both confront Aspasie in the very hour of her anticipated triumph, to her consequent ruin and destruction."

"Oh, shall we be able to do that, sir?"

"I answer for it."

"Still," sullenly, for the detective had as yet omitted to explain his manner of circumventing her unworthy lover, "you might have let me go off with Mr. Meadows. I love him so much, and he loves me, I am sure he does. Oh, what will he think of me?"

"Marguerite, can you love a thief?"

"John a thief!" indignantly. "It is false! It cannot be!"

"It is true. And he is ere this in jail, with the evidences of his crime beyond dispute. That he would have thrown suspicion on me, to save himself, is of no consequence, since he will doubtless receive his deserts; while, apart from all that, you, Marguerite, are saved from his base, mercenary designs."

He then gave the necessary particulars.

Marguerite suddenly threw herself into Luella's arms and burst into uncontrollable weeping.

"Oh, how mad, how wicked I would have been!" she raved. "Why does not God destroy me? Papa, my good, kind papa! I want to go to him—I want to tell him all, and beg his forgiveness on my bended knees!"

It was the tearful storm that brings repentance and amendment on its healing wings.

Old Grip made a sign to his wife that the girl was to pass the night with her; and then, hastily resuming his disguising characteristics, he quitted the hotel and returned to the Vanderloopen domicile.

The next morning, in the kitchen, he sought an early interview with Mrs. Blunt, the house-keeper.

"I've been given to understand, ma'm," said he, with a loftier flunkey air than was his wont, "that Miss Clayton passed a bad night, and will not be down to breakfast. She will remain in her room until noon, and does not wish to be disturbed on hany haccount."

"Is the young lady quite ill, sir?" asked Mrs. Blunt, her benevolent face expressive of much concern.

"Well, ma'm, she's 'orrily hout of sorts when I last saw 'er; but will hundoubtedly get better with repose and quiet."

The good woman was forthwith going down on her knees to pray away her young mistress's supposed indisposition, when the butler politely arrested the movement.

"One thing more, ma'm, afore you go to praying, if you'll be so werry kind and condescendin'!" he made bold to observe. "Miss Jenkins was hunexpectedly called away during the night."

"Sarah!"

"Yes, ma'm. Peraps it's a relative as is hill, you know, or something of the sort; and then, again, peraps it isn't. At hall events, she won't be back before this afternoon, though she 'opes to be before Mr. Vanderloopen's return from up the river. Now, ma'm, if it isn't a-haskin' too much, I trust you'll remember the rest of us in your prayers, and we'll have breakfast together."

Norah and the rest of them, in whose wondering presence these items of more or less fictitious information had been vouchsafed, were brimming with comments and covert inquiries,

as a consequence, during the repast, but the *pseudo* Mr. Squiggs was heroic in his reticence from first to last.

"Not another word, Miss Finnegan!" was his severe response to a last attempt on the part of the big cook, a little later on, when he was about quitting the house, "on vastly important business, you know," as he would solely admit. "But one thing—and not unimportant, heither, by the way—I will deign to hadvise you of right 'ere, my beauty."

"Och hone, but it's me darlint that ye air!" And she resignedly put her arms a-kimbo as he imperiously evaded an attempted embrace. "What is the saycret you'd let me into, me darlint?"

"Just this, my dear: When you see me again after to-day, you probably won't know me."

And, leaving her more mystified than ever, he hurried away.

After visiting his hotel, and ascertaining from Luella that Marguerite was apparently recovering her peace of mind, and beginning to look at things in a healthy light, he went to the pier of the Compagnie Transatlantique, fortunatly arriving there half an hour before the hour appointed for the meeting of Aspasie and Dysart.

The latter was already among the throngs on the pier, looking anxious and expectant, with his eyes, so to speak, everywhere at once.

"What, Thomas! is it you?" said the young man, recognizing the new arrival.

"Yes, sir," was the response. "I bring an important message, and must see you in private at once."

The scapegrace drew himself up a little, but somehow, when the butler beckoned him to follow in an unfrequented nook, where they would be unobserved, he obeyed.

Here the detective temporarily slipped off his wig and false whiskers, meantime looking his man steadily in the face.

Dysart recoiled with an oath.

"Old Grip, the detective!" he gasped.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ANOTHER "EYE-OPENER."

THE detective replaced his wig and false whiskers with much complacency.

"Correct, Mr. Dysart," he replied. "I am Old Grip, the detective."

The young man was no less bewildered than fear-stricken.

"So!" he managed to exclaim at last. "You have been enacting the part of a detective-spy in my uncle's house, under that flunkie disguise?"

"Let that go for the present. Why not question yourself first as to whether I am here in my flunkie or detective character."

Dysart turned pale without answering.

"I shall answer for myself, then. I am here to save you from the crime into which a false woman would have decoyed you, to your destruction."

"What—what can you mean?"

"You are expecting to meet Aspasie here at ten o'clock?"

"Yes."

"She will not come—never had the remotest idea of keeping the appointment; which was expressly made with the intention of securing your arrest, with the proceeds of your forgeries on your person. She induced you to quit the house Thursday in order to have a clear coast for the furtherance of her vile plot against you. She has long since secured an offer of marriage from your uncle and accepted it. She is now in Rhinebeck under Mr. Vanderloopen's escort. She may have already betrayed your crime to him. Your arrest may be telegraphed for by your indignant uncle before they quit Rhinebeck for home at noon to day!"

These terrible disclosures were poured into Waldo Dysart's astounded ears in an uninterrupted torrent.

They carried conviction with them.

The duped young man had listened as one in a nightmare. Then he struck his forehead with his clinched hand.

"Thunders of heaven!" he faltered: "what are these words but my occasional vague suspicions given voice to at last. But can it be?"

"It is the truth, and I am here to save you."

Dysart, who had grown frightfully haggard, grasped the detective's arm.

"Oh, but it is not too late?"

"I think and hope not. Tell me first if you believe absolutely everything I have set forth."

"I do, I cannot help it! My eyes seem to be suddenly opened, as if by a supernatural revelation. Oh, heavens!"

"And your present feeling toward this false woman?"

"Curse her!" Dysart's face was convulsed, and the imprecations were chokingly uttered. "Devils of the Infernal Pit! if I were but free to confront her with her treachery, to rescue my uncle from her poisonous contact!"

"That will do. Listen! you have your baggage still here on the pier!"

"Yes."

"Express it back to your hotel this instant. Then return here to me."

There was no doubting the sincerity with which Dysart hurried away to do as he was directed, though the detective kept an eye on him until his return, half out of breath.

"Now answer every question I put to you with the utmost candor," resumed Old Grip. "Everything may depend on that."

"I swear to you that I shall be truthful," panted Dysart, wiping his forehead. "Only save me!"

"You have the entire proceeds of your forgeries intact on your person now?"

"Yes."

"A hundred thousand dollars?"

"Exactly."

"How was the money obtained?"

"On five notes of hand for twenty thousand each."

"Who cashed them?"

"As many wealthy gentlemen, friends of my uncle and myself."

"Are they the sort of friends who would, on certain representations, receive back their money, and give up their notes?"

"Yes, I am sure of it. All are men of unbounded wealth, who good-naturedly consented to cash the notes as a matter of convenience to me."

"Give me their names and addresses."

Dysart wrote what was required on a card, and handed it to the detective.

"Good! come with me. Expedition means everything to you now, Mr. Waldo Dysart. In the mean time, pray earnestly to Heaven as you have never prayed before that it shall not be our misfortune to find a single one of these obsequious rich gentlemen out of town."

So saying, the detective led the way to a hack-stand, where, choosing an equipage whose horses seemed especially excellent, and with whose driver he chanced to be acquainted, they set out on their extraordinary round of calls.

To say that Waldo Dysart was in mental agony while these were being made, is to but feebly express what he really suffered.

Remorse, horror, panic, made his emotions their prey. As each separate business was disposed of successfully, he breathed a little freer, but only to endure a fresh access of suspense lest the next note-holder on the list might prove absent, and the evidence of his mad criminality thus be inaccessible.

Added to this was the growing terror of the order for his arrest having already been telegraphed to Police Headquarters, combined with the possibility of the carriage being stopped at any moment by some officer to take him into immediate custody.

Doubtless he deserved all that he suffered, but it was none the less wearing and dreadful for that, and before the expedition was completed he was looking so pitifully wretched that his companion compassionately remarked it.

"This will never do!" said the detective. "Your whiteness would discount a snow-wreath, and you are trembling like a leaf. You must have some brandy."

"No, no!" and Dysart made a lamentable effort to brace himself up. "There—there might be some one looking for me in such a public place as a bar-room. On, on!"

"Nonsense! Don't forget you're with me, young man."

"My God! I'm not likely to. Without you at my side, what would become of me?"

"Here we are!"

And the detective signaled a halt at a bar-room they chanced to be passing; where Dysart absorbed a great drink of brandy and soda, after which he felt a little niverier as the expedition was resumed, though still in a sufficiently miserable frame of mind.

"You should never attempt crime again, my friend," observed the detective, during one of the intervals. "Apart from the fact that the wages of sin is death, you haven't got what the Westerners term the sand for it."

Dysart hesitated a moment, and then fairly caught his companion in his arms.

"God love you, Old Grip! I am glad, I rejoice from the bottom of my miserable heart that it is so," he cried, hugging him. "I don't want to be a bad man, I have never wanted to! But for that foul siren's wiles, you would not be doing such a service as this for me to-day. Save me this once, and, even if my uncle casts me off to starve in the streets, I swear to you that I will die before succumbing to temptation again. God bless you, Old Grip, God bless you!"

"What you want to do, my friend," replied the detective, quizzingly, though secretly affected not a little by the young man's demonstrativeness, "is to brace up."

"But if we should fail in completing this errand?"

"We haven't tripped up yet, have we?"

"Thank God, no!"

"Well, don't let us holler before we are hurt. I've a sort of feeling that this thing is going through as if greased."

And so it did.

Every one of the note-holders was seen suc-

sively by the detective and his repentant companion. There was, very strange to say, not one of them who hesitated in acceding to the request made, after the requisite explanations. Finally, when the last visit had been made, the last dollar of the funds restored, and the last forged note was in Dysart's possession, an odd change was seen to have taken place in him.

In the first place, he insisted on stopping at a cigar store, where, after they had lighted the weeds selected, he ignited with a fresh match the incriminating bits of writing, twisted loosely together, and watched them slowly and thoughtfully until their last vestige was absolutely consumed.

Then, thrusting his arm through his companion's, he showed in his features a hungering and resentful expression, little short of fiendish in its malignity.

"Come!" he said, in a low, intense voice.

"Come, Old Grip!"

"Whither, and for what?" demanded the detective.

"Can you ask? To meet that she-devil in angel's guise, and to cast her down into the gulfs of defeat and despair into which she would so gladly have thrust me!"

"Not yet, you don't, my friend! All in good time, and very speedy time, for that matter! But you are first to come with me."

And leading him back to the coach, the detective gave him a brief account of Marguerite's interrupted elopement on their way to the hotel, where the pair of repentants were soon exchanging such confidences as were naturally evoked by such a meeting.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SHARPENING THE SWORD.

OLD GRIP and his wife had deemed it advisable to leave Marguerite and Waldo undisturbed in each other's company for about half an hour.

When they re-entered the little parlor in which the young people had been thus left to themselves, there was a suspicious separating movement on the part of the latter.

"'Ow is this?" exclaimed the detective, with a resumption of his broadest Cockneyism. "It 'ar' surely impossible that hany folks would wenture on love-making in these hinnocent haptiments."

"'Eavings! no, Mr. Squiggs," interposed Luella. "Leastwise, it 'aven't such a baltogether hunsuspicious look to me. Oh, Lud!"

Dysart gave a forced laugh and looked uncomfortable generally, while Marguerite cast down her eyes and blushed.

Then they both looked up and laughed at perceiving that both the butler and lady's-maid characters had been resumed in every particular.

"I see how it is!" cried Marguerite, springing to Luella, and kissing her. "It must be that our battle with the arch-enemy is at hand."

"That is just it," said Old Grip. "Our sword is sufficiently sharpened to stand the shock, I think. A messenger has just brought me word that Mr. Vanderloopen and Aspasie have not yet returned. But they may be back at any time, and we must forestall them, if possible."

"Would you mind telling us something of your winding-up plan?" asked Waldo, while they were making themselves ready.

"It can be told in a nutshell," replied the detective. "We must try to smuggle the pair of you, say, into the library (without the knowledge of the servants) to be produced as occasion may require to confound the triumphant charges that I feel confident Aspasie will not fail to make in short order, if, indeed, she shall not have done so already."

Here Marguerite, paling and blushing at the shameful recollection, said:

"She will receive a convenient prompting in my case, at least; for I left a little note for papa on my dressing-case."

"Just the thing!" exclaimed the detective. "'Jenkins' can hand it to Mr. Vanderloopen the first thing. That will open the ball for our astonishers; and in the mean time they must be kept out of the library. Come, now; no more loss of time must be risked."

They accordingly proceeded up-town in a close coach forthwith.

One stoppage was made for Old Grip to leave a message with Inspector Byrnes.

They dismissed their coach at the mouth of the stable alleyway, and then, the detective possessing a latch-key, they were so fortunate as to be able to slip into the house by the street door, unperceived.

Both the detective and Luella drew long breaths of relief when it became obvious that the Rhinebeck excursionists had not yet returned; and Marguerite and Dysart were accordingly shut up in the library forthwith.

But a few minutes later, by a wonderful coincidence, and even before the servants could be notified of the butler's and lady's-maid's return, the carriage from the Grand Central Depôt drove up, and Mr. Vanderloopen and Aspasie stepped out.

As they did so, Cheese-it, who was on the opposite sidewalk, looking particularly hard-breathed, made a sign that was understood by Old Grip, who was with Luella on the high

stoop to give formal welcome to the returned couple.

"By Jupiter! you were out in your forecast," exclaimed the detective, in his wife's ear.

"What do you mean?"

"They have been married while away! That signal of Cheese it's is unmistakable."

Here he hurried down the steps to take the portmanteaus, while "Jenkins" remained at the door to pilot the new arrivals elsewhere than in the library, if necessary, though there was but little doubt that they would first enter the drawing-rooms of their own volition.

This proved to be the case.

It was noticed that Mr. Vanderloopen looked distressed, while there was in Aspasie's air a proud and confident expression.

"Oho!" thought the fictitious butler; "we have had some at least of our bad news hinted to us already, as a preparative, and our she-devil is already queen of our millions in her own estimation."

"Sarah, my dear, you are looking anxious," commented Aspasie, in a languid way. "Ciel! what is the matter?"

"Oh, ma'am, I'll tell you presently, if you please," was the dejected reply. "I 'ave 'ad something of a turn, ma'am."

"Squiggs, come with us, both of you," said Mr. Vanderloopen. He had been relieved of his hat and light overcoat, and was just following Aspasie into the back drawing-room, whose door the butler was subsequently holding open for them. "There is something I wish to say to you."

"Yezzur."

The next moment they were accordingly all in the back drawing-room, with merely the *portière* hangings separating them from the library, in which Marguerite and Waldo were silently waiting, and presumably alert to every syllable that was uttered.

"Jenkins" had just relieved Aspasie of her hat and mantle, and the latter, haughtily beautiful and composed, had sunk into a seat in an attitude of queenly indifference, when Mr. Vanderloopen turned to the others, and said:

"This lady is henceforth the mistress of my house. We were privately married at Rhinebeck yesterday. You will advise the servants of this, and at the same time warn them against any ill-advised celebration of the event until permission is received from me."

Judging from the reception of the intelligence on the part of Mr. Squiggs and Jenkins, there was not much likelihood of any celebration being tumultuously precipitated, to say the least.

The former had responded by his most ornate bow, but with a face as solemn as an owl's, while Jenkins, in spite of Aspasie's expectant pose, merely clasped her hands and courtesied with a sort of jerk.

"Highly gratifying, surely!" murmured Aspasie, her dark cheeks showing the red spot of angry mortification on either side. "However, servants are never to be depended on for tact, my dear Calvin. *N'importe!*"

"What's the matter with you two?" exclaimed Mr. Vanderloopen, with ill-suppressed fury.

"Ho, sir!" stammered the butler; "such an 'orrid and unforeseen misfortune, sir!"

Aspasie gave a little horrified exclamation, and seemed about to essay a faint.

"What do you mean, sir?" thundered the merchant. "Would you dare—"

"Ho, Lord, sir! no, by no manner of means."

"Miss Marguerite 'ave run away last night!" whimpers Jenkins, coming to the rescue. "She 'ave left this for you, sir."

Mr. Vanderloopen stared, and then mechanically took from her hand a note that she was timidly extending toward him.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BOLT FALLS.

MR. VANDERLOOPEN read the note in a dazed way, and then dropped into a chair, momentarily overcome.

His new wife was at his side instantly, with much show of sympathy and devotion.

"What is it?" she exclaimed.

He mastered something of his agitation with an effort.

"Rita has eloped with John Meadows, my coachman!" he replied, sternly. "Don't touch that letter, Aspasie!" It had fallen to the floor, and she would have picked it up. "Leave it where it lies to be swept out by the servants. And never mention that girl's name to me from this instant henceforth. I wash my hands of her forever!"

The last few words were gloomily addressed to the butler and maid, no less than to Aspasie.

"Oh, but this is simply terrible!" exclaimed Aspasie. "The ingrate, the hypocritical little wretch!"

"Let it go, my dear. Fondly as I had grown to love the child, she is not worth your noble indignation."

"But this blow, to come upon you as it does, so cruelly swift upon the heels of Waldo Dysart's unheard-of rascality!"

The butler here signed mournfully to Jenkins, and made a movement to withdraw.

"Stop!" cried Mr. Vanderloopen, harshly. "You might as well have all the villainous news at once. It would come to you and your fellow-servants sooner or later, and the scandal had better be launched without varnish from the outset."

"Yezzur!" And the butler came to a deeply respectful pause, with his companion at his side. "Might I, your Honor," with genuine sorrow, though not exactly for the immediate unhappiness in hand, "might I be hallowed to offer my respectful sympathy, sir, in the misfortunes that seem to 'ave overtaken you, sir?"

"It would do no good, Thomas, though I thank you," replied the merchant, more kindly. "Besides, events can scarcely be real misfortunes that unmask hypocrites and scoundrels, who have been dependent upon one's beneficence only to betray one in the end—to bite and tear the hand that has caressed them from the first!" with intense bitterness.

Then, as the butler put on an amazed air, Aspasie interposed.

"Mr. Vanderloopen received a sad shock just as we were quitting Rhinebeck this morning," she explained. "It was in the shape of a telegram to me to the effect that Mr. Dysart had absconded with an immense sum of his uncle's money, obtained on forged acceptances."

"Never mention his name again either!" cried the merchant. "The ingrate fool has made his bed, and he must lie upon it."

"May it prove a bed of thorns!" exclaimed Aspasie, venomously. "Ciel! I might have warned you of this through my premonitions, Cal-in. Even at such times when I have forced myself to accept certain social attentions from that young man (I remembered that he was dear to you, Calvin) I have feared that you were nourishing a serpent in your bosom. *Mon Dieu!* how I detested him, though I could not say so!"

"Say no more, my love. If the scoundrel should ever venture to return to these shores, public disgrace and punishment shall be his portion. As it is—let him go. I leave him to the tortures of his own conscience; if he should prove to have any, which I doubt."

"He ought to be in prison at this minute, instead of at freedom on the blue water," said Aspasie, discontentedly. "To think of all that money!"

"Houtrageous!" Mr. Squiggs ventured to exclaim. "Haren't you going to arrest the hingare, sir?"

"No," replied the gentleman, forgetful in his earnestness that he was discussing his misfortunes with a butler. "Aspasie, perhaps with justice, insisted on my doing so. But no; I shall reimburse whomsoever may have innocently cashed the forgeries, and let the scoundrel go with his ill-gotten wealth. I cannot forget," with emotion, that he is my only sister's only child—that I once loved him and—and perhaps still do so, in spite of his black ingratitude and treachery."

Aspasie made a passionately scornful gesture.

"Oh, this weakness!" she cried. "Calvin, my husband, it is unworthy of you! There is still time; the Normandie cannot yet be out of the lower bay. A telegram to the lightship might yet secure the fugitive's ignominious arrest, with the procees of his foul crime—think of that—a hundred thousand dollars!—on his person. Strike while yet you may!"

The merchant looked at his new wife in mingled grief and consternation.

"Aspasie, I will not!" he exclaimed. "Do not, I beg of you, mar the earlier hours of our union with a continued discussion of this subject. My determination is immovable."

She bowed submissively, but with only a half-defeated look in her angry eyes.

"Sir," said the pseudo-butler, with a certain change in his voice and manner that instantly challenged attention, though the Cockneyism was still retained in his enunciation, "may I ask if you could find it in your eart to forgive this herring young man, should it prove that 'ee 'ad repented his crime, and halready made hall the reparation in 'is power?"

Aspasie was about to interpose with furiously contemptuous words, when the merchant silenced her by a gesture of mingled entreaty and command.

"Good heavens! what can you mean, Thomas?" he demanded, excitedly. "Of course, I could, and would be only too happy to take the foolish boy back to my heart again, under such circumstances as you suggest."

"Another question, if you please, sir. If Miss Marguerite, hunder somewhat similar circumstances—"

"Should also have hesitated midway in her mad folly, and seek to return to my arms?" interposed Mr. Vanderloopen, wildly. "That is what you mean, Thomas Squiggs?"

"Hexactly, your Honor."

"Good God! of course I would take her back. But," with increased agitation, "what can you mean, my man? By Heaven! there is a strange exultation in your looks. If I but deemed it possible—"

"Possible!" all but screamed Aspasie, now half-beside herself with sudden alarms and forebodings on her own part. "Are you mad, my husband, that you would condescend to listen

to such preposterous suggestions from a servant—a mere hireling—or even so far forget yourself as to discuss your private griefs with such as he?"

"Still, my dear Aspasie," Mr. Vanderloopen began, but came to another pause as she turned furiously upon the pretended Squiggs.

"And who and what are you?" she cried, confronting the latter with unspeakable contempt and scorn. "By what sign dare you, a flunky servant in my house, to interfere in these matters?"

"By this sign!" was the thundered reply, as the detective swept aside sufficient of his disguising characteristics to suddenly stand revealed before them. "Behold!"

Aspasie shrieked, and staggered back, with her hands extended before her eyes, as if to shut out the Nemesis of her crimes!

"Old Grip, the Detective!" she gasped; "Mon Dieu!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE ADVENTURESS'S DEFEAT.

LUELLA had likewise made such rapid changes in her appearance as to stand revealed for something far different and even more attractive than the pert cockney lady's-maid, whose personality had thus far been so familiar in that household.

Aspasie, who had sunk into a chair, gazed from the detective to her in a stunned, bewildered maze—through which, however, she probably already recognized the specter of her approaching ruin and defeat—but was too dazed as yet to say another word.

Mr. Vanderloopen, though, in whom there was more reserved, self-contained force than might have been supposed in view of his recent infatuation, had by this time rallied from his first astonishment.

"So, sir!" he exclaimed; "you are, indeed, Edward Grippon, otherwise Old Grip, the famous detective?"

A bow of assent.

"And who, may I ask, is that young lady at your side?"

"My wife, Luella Grippon, who has faithfully cooperated with me in this case."

"In this case!" with ironical emphasis.

"Yes, sir."

"You have both successfully masqueraded in your parts here in my house!"

"We are modestly aware of that fact, Mr. Vanderloopen."

"But at whose instance, sir? Come, you say 'in this case'; what case do you refer to, and at whose instance have you undertaken it?"

"To answer your first and last question first, sir," replied the detective, with becoming impressiveness, "at the instance of one who is now no more—your former beloved wife, Althea Vanderloopen!"

The merchant gave a violent start, but, before he could interpose, the detective continued:

"Almost at the point of death, sir, your wife engaged me to enter into a covenant with her for the protection of her daughter Marguerite, after she should be no more, from the evil machinations of that horrible woman," pointing at Aspasie, now slowly rallying her panic-stricken faculties, "which she forefeit with the strangely intuitive, if not prophetic, spirit that is so often manifested at the approach of dissolution. I accepted that sacredly intrusted guardianship, and I have kept faith with the dead. Nay, I have done more than I covenanted. Not only is Marguerite rescued, repentant and enlightened, from the ruinous step to which that wretch has disguisedly urged her from the first, but your nephew, Waldo Dysart, also—"

Aspasie interrupted him with a hoarse exclamation, as she suddenly sprung to her feet, once more superbly beautiful and defiant in her forlorn hope, and waved him back impotently, while her glorious black eyes were like wells of spouting fire.

"False, false, false!" she cried. "Give no heed to the boaster's fictions, Calvin. I charge you not to, as you are now my husband and I am your lawfully-wedded wife. What a tissue of absurdities! Marguerite was ever advised by me against her guilty and disgraceful passion. She is now the stable-smelling coachman's wife—must be ere this; and Waldo is, thanks to your weakness, doubtless by this time on the high seas with the proceeds of his forgeries of your signature in his possession. We have sufficient proofs to this effect. If this vaunting spy's charges or claims have any ground to stand on, let him produce testimony to the contrary, if he can and dare! Why, on the very face of his assertions—"

Here she started back with another scream, as from a last home-thrust at her perishing plot.

Luella, in obedience to a sign from her husband, had dragged aside the *portière*, and Waldo Dysart and Marguerite Claytou, hand in hand, and with their countenances suggestive of what they had overheard, were advancing slowly and threateningly toward the unmasked adventuress.

Mr. Vanderloopen, however, interposed, his

face a strange index of contending emotions, in which, perhaps, a sort of joy was at this juncture paramount.

"Speak!" he exclaimed, addressing himself to the detective. "Is it as you have foreshadowed? They have been rescued from the misery they had so madly designed for themselves?"

"They assuredly have," was the reply.

Then, before the detective could explain more fully, the merchant opened his arms.

Marguerite sprung into them with a joyful cry, and was folded to her step-father's breast, while Waldo, flinging himself upon one knee at his uncle's feet, bowed his face in his hands in an agony of shame and remorse.

But the merchant speedily disengaged one of his hands for the purpose of raising the prodigal, and then the latter was also taken forgivingly to that generous bosom.

"Explanations will wait!" exclaimed Mr. Vanderloopen. "You are restored to me, and you will sin no more! I ask no richer joy than this consciousness for the present."

But here Aspasie, who had once more recovered her desperate assurance, strode into the foreground of this prettily dramatic picture.

"I think I shall have something to say to this arrangement," she said, insolently. "Calvin Vanderloopen, I am your wife, and, as you yourself have declared, the mistress of this domestic establishment from this time forth. And I wish to say right here that that disgraced girl," pointing witheringly at Marguerite, "shall not continue under this roof; while that absconding thief," indicating Waldo with no less indignation, "can no longer remain a visitor here."

The concluding words faltered slightly, though, as she marked her husband pale and shrink back from her with a look of growing repulsion in his high-bred face.

"Enough of this travesty!" suddenly interposed the detective, with a gesture of command. "Waldo Dysart, speak! Whom were you anticipating to accompany you in your proposed guilty flight abroad of this morning, as the sharer of your heart and the proceeds of your forgeries?"

"That woman!" replied Waldo, pointing to Aspasie, disgustedly. "It was solely on the strength of that promise of hers that I was there—that I permitted her to urge me into the forgeries. The promise was given with countless kisses and endearments in this very room, day before yesterday, and it was at her instance that I quitted this house on a pretense of seeking the sea-shore for my health. Her object in that move is sufficiently obvious now, though it was not so at that time. It was to make a clear coast for the traitress, that, unbeknown to me, she might quit the city with my good uncle, to the consummation of her grand design upon him—by making herself his wife and the mistress of his millions, after Marguerite and I should both have forever forfeited his love and protection through our own folly, cunningly propagated by this adventuress into madness and crime!"

Aspasie had merely shrugged her magnificent shoulders, listening with an air of quiet scorn, not unmixed with well-assumed wonder, which had, perhaps, not been altogether without its effect on the shocked and appalled master of the house.

But when Luella unexpectedly corroborated the young man's declarations, she paled yet again, and seemed to be holding her own by sheer will-power.

"I was concealed in the library," said the detective's wife, "and distinctly heard the interview to which Mr. Dysart alludes. He rather understates the extent of this woman's villainy and treachery than otherwise."

"But a few minutes after its conclusion, sir," to Mr. Vanderloopen, "I not only overheard but was present at this woman's succeeding interview with yourself in the library. It was absolutely necessary that both my husband and I should take advantage of such opportunities in the furtherance of our scheme for this adventuress's defeat."

"The blandishments which were then lavished upon you were freshly taken from your nephew, whom she had it in her heart to destroy even while deluding him with her kisses and promises."

"It was I who caused the fall of the window-curtain, behind which I had taken refuge upon my retreat from that room being cut off."

Here there was confusion and dismay. Aspasie had just drawn her dagger, and sprung with it at Luella's throat!

CHAPTER XLVII.

ASPASIE'S FORLORN HOPE.

BUT Old Grip had not been unwatchful.

To spring in between the infuriated adventuress and her prospective victim, disarm her and then burl her back almost the entire width of the spacious room, with prodigious force, was but the work of an instant with such a trained athlete as he.

A less robust and supple woman than Aspasie might have been seriously injured by the terrible force with which her murderous attempt had been repulsed. But, she was once more erect and defiant, after an undignified tumble into a luxurious divan; her eyes ablaze, her

cheeks flushed, her lips lit by the splendor of her battle-smile.

She again strode forward, fixing her husband with a last glorious look of mingled entreaty and passion.

"Strike, but hear me!" she exclaimed. "Calvin, my husband! though appearances seem so accusingly against me—"

He retreated, with a gesture of such loathing that she could not but pause in momentary embarrassment.

"No, woman!" he cried; "it is my turn now, and do you hear me, for the enlightenment of those that may have the courage to listen without being appalled. Rose Meurtrante, alias *Purplette de Gants*, alias Aspasie Molière-Siddons, your course of evil is about run at last! Double murderer! your next step out of this room shall be in the direction of the hangman's noose! Your infamous brother, Jules Meurtrante, otherwise Fraggaponi, your hair-dresser, is already in prison. Moreover—and this I only learned to-day on my way hither—he has confessed!"

She had nerved herself to listen to whatever he might say with iron composure and indifference. But at the first mention of Fraggaponi she had started, while the significantly-emphasized words in conclusion had caused her to shiver as if under a sudden mortal blow.

But almost as instantly did she recover.

"Your words are perfectly inexplicable to me, sir," she replied icily. "To what, pray, has the barber you allude to confessed?"

"To the murder of Laban Hertzikoff, the Seventh avenue diamond-broker, in which terrible deed *you*, Rose Meurtrante, were the principal!"

The Russian Jew's murder was still fresh in the minds of the newspaper-reading public. A simultaneous exclamation of horror burst from Mr. Vanderloopen, Marguerite and Dysart, who remained grouped together. But, even now, save for one convulsive start, quickly mastered, the desperate siren did not blemish; and, folding her arms, she stood regarding her accuser with impassive scorn.

But the detective had only just started in, as it were—was only on the first of his disclosures, with this woman's ignominious shame, exposure and destruction as his sweepstakes.

With scarcely a pause, the entire history of the stolen diamonds, together with the tragic and other complications developing out of the same, rushed from his lips, with the minutest details.

Then he exhibited the rubber overshoe which he had obtained from Nadka, following which he also displayed the telltale gold hairpin; accompanying these exhibits with the history of each as connecting both Meurtrantes, brother and sister, with the commission of the awful deed.

"Look!" he exclaimed, dangling the pin aloft. "By Heaven! the companion of this trinket, which fastens this murder upon this fiend in woman's form, by a strange perversity on her part, even now glistens in her hair!"

Aspasie grew livid, but was then as composed as before.

But the detective had not yet finished.

After winding up with the diamonds-and-murder affair, as it may be called, he suddenly sprung behind the adventuress, and, by throwing his arms tightly around her shoulders from behind, pinioned her arms to her sides as in a steel vise.

"The gloves! the mitts!" he cried. "You shall see at last what they conceal, and the tragic story that is interwoven therewith, and the early history of *Purplette des Gants*, shall then be made known to you all!"

Aspasie was twisting her neck this way and that, in her mad endeavor to tear her captor with her teeth.

But it was of no avail. Luella's fingers were already upon the fastenings of the mysterious mitts.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

NEMESIS.

THE next instant, notwithstanding a sort of hoarse howl from the adventuress's lips, the mitts were stripped away, and their hideous secret revealed!

Both arms were marked with deep, blood-red, streaking scars from elbow to knuckles, though, but for these disfigurements, they were as perfect in modeling and texture as a sculptor could have desired.

"See!" cried the remorseless detective. "This creature was a murderer at sixteen—the sweet sixteen, with which we mostly associate the loveliest charms of girlish joyousness and budding innocence!—and these are the scars of her victim's finger-nails in his death-agony under the repeated strokes of her dagger. Ha! you may well shudder! You may well shrink from her, beautiful as she is, as from a monster of such hideous mien that her mere atmosphere might strike you blind or dead!"

"Trailing her inborn wickedness from generations of viperous ancestry, born in a hovel of *Les Marais*, bred in the evil that is her family trait, raised to comparative luxury and refinement by such an accident that can only be at-

tributed to the sarcasm of destiny, only to seek once more her squalid level by choice; then murder, her father meeting an assassin's fate at the guillotine, she herself, together with her brother Jules, a transport to New Caledonia, her escape thence, and after that, lo! a meteor on the social and professional horizon in the deformed once more transformed into Mademoiselle Aspasie Molière-Siddons, the eloquent exponent of the dramatic masters!"

"Sounds like a romance, doesn't it?—or perhaps like some weird phantasmagoria from some opium-sodden novelist's brain?"

"But you shall have the details, my friends: and they are here!"

With that, he cast the defeated and exposed Aspasie upon the divan, where Luella fearlessly stood guard over the now cowering and pallid wretch, and, whipping the letter of his Paris correspondent out of his pocket, he began to translate its contents without further preliminaries.

With the substance of this information the reader is already familiar, from the account of Old Grip's long interview with Nadka Hertzikoff.

Its effect in the present instance upon those who listened to its amazing disclosures may be left to the imagination.

But Old Grip had hardly finished the reading when there was a shot, and he started back as a leaden messenger just grazed his ear before burying itself in the opposite wall!

Then there was fresh confusion as Luella was seen wrestling for her life with the desperate Aspasie, in whose hand was the still smoking pistol with which she would have taken the detective's life.

Old Grip was about to rush to his wife's assistance when Luella, with her bright hair a-stream down her back like a torrent of gold, suddenly precipitated herself upon her opponent—fiendish in her fury, but beautiful still, her hair tossing around her like a midnight cloud—with such force as to burl her crushingly against the divan, when, with a low cry, the adventuress fell into a swoon.

Luella coolly arose, and began to knot up her hair with the utmost good-humor.

"You must remember that I am a showman's daughter," she said, in a half-apologetic way, to the family trio, "and was at one time not unused to scenes of violence, though, to be sure, they were mostly in wild-beast cages, with iron bars between the spectators and the unruly animals with which I contended."

"This thing is about ended," said Old Grip, peremptorily.

He gave a signal, and two men, whom he introduced as detectives from Inspector Byrnes's Bureau, and who had quietly taken up their station in the hall, entered the room.

Old Grip pointed to the unconscious adventuress, and spoke a few words in a scarcely-audible tone.

At that instant Aspasie recovered her senses (if indeed she had wholly lost them, which was not likely) and rose slowly to her feet.

There was a fallen but grand majesty in the movement that was not without its pathos.

Moreover, the beauty of the woman was so extraordinary, even in her bitter humiliation and deserved defeat, that the detectives instinctively started back—one of them even with the ominously glistening handcuff still in his hands.

She smiled sadly, while hastily doing up her fallen hair with untroubled fingers.

And yet was it the smile of a spirit thoroughly broken at last, or still undaunted, indomitable, devilish, underneath a piteous mask?

"Don't put those horrid things upon me!" she said, in a low, thrilling voice, with a shrinking gesture, "at least, not yet."

Then, as the detectives still hesitated, she approached her husband in a mournfully resigned attitude which, save only for the awful disclosures that had been made concerning her, might have yet appealed to his leniency.

But one glance at the hard, appalled gaze, not unmixed with disgust, notwithstanding her still unexampled beauty, which he turned toward her, was enough.

"I see that I cannot be forgiven," she murmured, "that you have no mercy for such as I."

He nodded an icy affirmative.

"I shall never make public the fact that you have made me your wife, if you will grant me one last little request."

"If reasonable and in my power," he replied, coldly, "it shall be granted unconditionally. What is it?"

"You remember that I was to occupy the rooms that had been the—the late Mrs. Vanderloopen's?"

"Yes," harshly.

She hesitated.

"Go on with your request!"

"It is merely that—that you will permit me to occupy them now a few minutes—say, five minutes—alone be—before they take me away."

"What for?"

There was something indescribably broken and humbled in her manner.

"I—I dreamed so vividly of occupying those

rooms as the proud mistress of this proud house. I would so like to lose my thoughts in them, to—to forget myself once more in that beautiful dream, before the—the hopelessness of despair shuts down over me forever."

"You shall have your wish." And he abruptly averted his face, as if still fearing the magnetism of her beauty, so strangely saddened and softened as it had become.

The others had heard and noted.

Old Grip silently opened the door for her, leaving it wide open as she passed slowly out, and then motioned significantly to the Central Office detectives.

The latter followed, the one to take his station at the foot of the stairs, the other under the windows of the rooms in question outside the house, a sign from Old Grip having notified him of their location.

Aspasie was heard to ascend the stair, and then to enter the rooms, which were the most luxurious in the house, and just off the first landing.

Two—three minutes elapsed, and then Old Grip suddenly started.

"Heavens!" striking his forehead; "why didn't I suspect it before? The diamonds! the diamonds!"

With these words he sprung noiselessly into the hall.

"Follow—quick!" was his command to the detective out there.

Then he was up the stairs like a flash, with the other at his heels.

Then a scream, suggesting a wild-cat in the toils, rung from the apartments above, and this was followed by the sounds of a tremendous struggle.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THOSE DIAMONDS.

LED by Mr. Vanderloopen himself, the remaining occupants of the drawing-room rushed up the stairs.

The struggle was over by the time they entered the *boudoir-salon* in which it had been going on, but a terribly dramatic scene was still presented.

Writhing and tossing on the richly-carpeted floor, snarling and frothing at the mouth, yet secured by the Central Office man, who was holding her down, with the handcuffs already on her wrists, was the whilom radiantly beautiful Rose Meurtrante, the adventuress, the very picture of feminine but brute fury in its last desperation.

An open window near at hand was suggestive of her ultimate intention after attaining the solitude of the apartments.

Standing over a ripped-up corner of the carpet, from which he had evidently just arisen out of a stooping posture, was Old Grip, the detective, triumphantly elate and with the missing diamonds, glittering gloriously like an arrested rivulet of crystal fire, in his exulting grasp.

"No sham this time!" he cried, "and my diamond-trail ends here at last."

"See!" and he pointed to the corner at his feet. "Doesn't this explain the situation?"

"She doubtless concealed them here days and days ago, intending to have the jewels come unexpectedly (for others than herself) to light, perhaps in the renovation of the rooms, after she should come to occupy them as the undisputed mistress of this house."

A few minutes later, thoroughly secured, voiceless and limp, she was placed in a carriage by the two officers and driven away.

Her departure was witnessed by the others, together with the servants, from the main hallway.

Mr. Vanderloopen was hardly recognizable, so piteously had shame and humiliation wrought upon him.

"Good God! and I have loved—or thought I loved—this terrible being!" he exclaimed, in a broken voice.

He was turning into the library, for the solitude of his agonizing thoughts, when Marguerite suddenly threw herself, weeping wildly, in his arms.

"Wait, papa, wait!" she sobbed. "Take me with you! You have got me yet, thank God! thank God!"

He pressed his trembling lips to her forehead, pressed her slight form yet more closely to his breast, and passed into the room out of sight with her.

Waldo Dysart had been scarcely less affected by the succession of terrible scenes.

"My friend," he managed to say, grasping Old Grip's hand, while Luella sought distraction from her thoughts by mystifying the servants at the rear end of the hall as to what had become of Mr. Squiggs and his lovely red whiskers, together with Sarah Jenkins, the lady's-maid that was, "do you believe in witchcraft?"

"Not a bit of it!" laughingly replied the other, perceiving the drift of the young man's thoughts.

"I do, and also in metempsychosis—the transmigration of souls!" continued Dysart, earnestly. "The legends of Lilith and Lamia, the serpent-woman, are no idle dreams. They are no more fictitious than our histories of Messa-

lina, Theodora, Lucretia Borgia, the Brinvilliers, Madame de Merteuil and other she-devils of the past. And if all their souls combined have not come back into the flesh to reappear in the person of this breathing horror in human shape, Aspasie Molière-Siddons, as she has been known to us, I don't know what I am talking about!"

"That is just it, Waldo—you don't know what you are talking about," was the detective's response. "Pretty much all the witchcraft or sorcery there is in the world, in these days, at least, is just—wickedness and human deviltry. Take my advice, my boy. It is this: Fight off your morbid fancies with wholesome resolves, be no longer a do-nothing profligate, but a man, and then thank God for the priceless opportunity which, when you are worthy of it, is doubtless in store for you."

"What is that opportunity?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"To marry Marguerite Clayton, if she will have you, as I think she will. She is a splendid girl, for all of that maudering nonsense about John, the coachman, and you are doubtless destined one day to be supremely happy in her possession."

At this juncture Luella led forward the delegation from below-stairs, with fat Norah at their head, and Mrs. Blunt meekly bringing up the rear.

"Here, Grip, my dear!" she smilingly said. "They recognize the fact that it was I who was Sarah Jenkins, but will not accept my assurance—Norah especially—that they will never see Mr. Squiggs, the butler, again."

The detective smiled.

"Miss Finnegan," he gravely observed, "what was the last thing that Mr. Squiggs, the butler, said to you?"

"Och! as if I w'u'd forget them mystayrious parting wur-rds av the lovely mon!" cried Norah. "'Miss Finnegan,' says he, 'whin ye say me again you probably won't know me.'"

"Well, and didn't he speak the truth?"

"How the devil should I know, your Honor?"

"Why, you do see him again at this instant, and yet you do not know him."

"Is it Mr. Squiggs, wid his lovely whiskers, that I see, sor?"

"Well, hardly with his whiskers, lovely or otherwise, but he stands before you."

"But where, sor?"

"In my person."

At last the truth dawned upon the woman, and she seemed disposed to weep over the shattering of some exquisite dream in which the beef-eater floridity and Dundreary red whiskers of the evanished Mr. Squiggs had probably floated most conspicuously and with a visionary enchantment all their own; but the detective burst into such a genial laugh, while tapping Norah's double chin so roguishly, that she could not but at last join in the merriment at her own expense; whereupon the general good-humor was unrestrained. Buttons, Mary Ann and Gretchen being alike hilarious, while good Mrs. Blunt, before seeking devotional retirement *apropos* of a nervous return-shock over the recent household sensations, whispered in Luella's kindly ear that the hand of the Lord was in it all, though every disagreeableness might have been obviated, or at least greatly ameliorated, at the voice of prayer.

"Och, and sure thin!" cried Norah: "was it yourself, the great detective, that has brought pace out of toormoil, and int the wicked furrin woman to her foster-father, the devil, at last, that was Mr. Squiggs, wid the darlint whiskers, through it all?"

Old Grip nodded.

"Be gob! thin it's a last embrace Oi'll give you for the good ye have done, aiven if the Squiggs part av ye is a dr'ame av beauty niver to return. To me ar-rums, ye fairy mon!"

And she forthwith, before he could well escape, wrapped him in her capacious caress; none laughing more merrily at his half-smothered embarrassment than Luella herself.

A moment later Mr. Vanderloopen, looking comparatively composed, reappeared, when there was a skurrying flight in the direction of the kitchen, so that the detective and his wife were alone left with the master of the house.

The street-door had been left open, the day being lowering and sultry.

Mr. Vanderloopen had just grasped the detective by the hand, with a grateful side-glance for Luella, and was beginning to express in faltering words his deep sense of the indebtedness under which he deemed himself to have been placed, when one of the officers who had driven away with the prisoner, appeared on the stoop, followed by the indefatigable Cheese-it.

There was an odd look in the man's face, and he mounted the steps with hesitation.

Old Grip was quick to take the alarm.

"What is it?" he exclaimed. "The woman has not escaped?"

"From human penalties, yes," was the reply.

"She is dead!"

"Dead!"

The officer bowed his head.

"Whether it was from poison concealed in one of the rings she wore, or not, future in-

vestigation will have to determine," he gravely explained. "She was very quiet in the coach. But, when we were about half-way to Headquarters with her, she suddenly put her manacled hands to her face, and seemed to be swallowing something. We had hold of her in an instant, but it was too late. Her eyes were glazing, and the lips with which she smiled her mockery of us (and, good Lord, what an awful smile that was! I'll not forget it while I live) were already swollen and black. We drove to a drug-store in a hurry, but she was stone dead before we could get her out of the coach. Jim has gone on with the body. We both thought it best I should come back here with the news. I met your little chap, Cheese-it, a few moments later, Gripon—he had doubtless been shadowing us from the moment of our driving off, though he's as dumb as an oyster on the subject—and he came with me."

A few moments of profound silence followed this tragic announcement, while Cheese-it silently sidled up to Luella, and she mechanically patted his head.

Then Mr. Vanderloopen started out of a troubled reflective mood into which he had fallen.

"It is better thus, far better!" he muttered; and, without another word, strode back into the library.

CHAPTER L.

LAST WORDS.

JUSTICE was not cheated by Rose Meurtrante, alias Purplette of the Gloved Hands, alias Aspasie Molière-Siddons, alone.

Three days after her death, Jules Meurtrante, alias Fraggaponi, was found dead in his cell.

His was also a case of suicide by poison, though, unlike the case of his sister (who was found, as her custodians had suspected, to have obtained her death-draught from a few drops of a solution of hydrocyanic acid concealed in the curiously-constructed setting of one of her finger-rings), it has always remained a mystery how he managed to secure the deadly substance undetected.

But enough of these moral monstrosities, and, whether wholly responsible for their incorrigible inclination for crime, or the diseased excrescences of a fatal heredity, we shall cheerfully leave them to sleep in their obscure and dis-honored graves.

Mr. Vanderloopen managed to live down the scandal so naturally incident to his miserable third marriage; and, if somewhat melancholy, is still living, a hale old gentleman, with a strong penchant for the collection of *objets d'art* and costly bric-a-brac.

But perhaps the chief softening of his unhappy recollections is found in the society of Marguerite and Waldo Dysart, who were happily married a twelvemonth after the tragic *denouement* of our sad story, the costly diamond *parure*, which had been the chief cause of so many exciting incidents and adventures, forming the step-father's bridal-gift.

Waldo's reform has been genuine and permanent, and Marguerite, who came to love him dearly at his true worth, doubtless never recurs in memory to her foolish first passion for her mercenary coachman-lover without more or less mental amazement at the unworthy infatuation that could so have glamourized her emotional immaturity.

She still reads the story-papers, however, though discriminately, and with perfect safety to her equilibrium. They are still living in New York, with their charming children around them; and, while there is no longer any doubt as to the heirship to the Vanderloopen millions, Waldo has developed a praiseworthy interest in public charities, to many of which he is a liberal and untiring contributor.

The longevity of the Streletzki stock, of which old Nadka Hertzikoff boasted so eagerly as perhaps to imbibe the impression that she herself might worship gold and defy the King of Terrors indefinitely, did not save her from finally succumbing to the miserliness tempted fate which had overtaken her brother, Achimelech, and subsequently old Laban himself.

She was found choked to death in her chair, with her arsenal of antiquated weapons contemptuously scattered around her, and her money-safe, duly rifled, at the side of her corpse.

But it was rather a vulgar crime, with little or no romantic mystery about it, in this instance, as a couple of neighboring toughs were convicted in short order of the crime, and paid the penalty thereof with life sentences in the State's Prison.

As for our redoubtable detective, Old Grip, both he and his faithful wife, Luella, were magnificently rewarded for their parts by which peace and happiness were finally extracted out of the plotting mystery and mischief which have formed the chief staple of the foregoing "strange eventful history."

They are frequent visitors of the Dysarts, with whom they have remained on the most congenial and intimate terms.

THE END.

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